

Connected Communities

Architecture > < Community

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+

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Architecture >< Community

Lorens Holm

Executive Summary

This scoping study looks at the role architecture plays in humanities research into the cohesion and/or disintegration of communities, and suggests areas for collaboration. Without prejudice to other disciplines we developed the architecture - psychoanalysis collaboration as a worked example. The project has 5 components:

- Literature review of humanities databases beginning with keywords 'architecture and community';
- Paper based on this work titled 'Architecture and its Communities' drafted by Thomas Deckker;
- Study visit to recent housing in the Netherlands in which social science and humanities people advised the design team;
- Symposium in Dundee: a presentation of findings to our humanities advisory group + a discussion of future collaborative research;
- Proposals for collaborative research with the humanities disciplines (item 9 of this report + appendixes 1&2).

Regarding architecture research,... **The resolution of a complex plan** – like the resolution of an argument in philosophy - is itself the affirmative answer to a research question. Additionally architecture has a long legacy of mapping projects, in which the social relations and affections of a community can be visualised and spatialised as part of a research project.

'Architecture and its Communities' and the IJburg study will be published in architecture journals.

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See the website of the Geddes Institute for Urban Research for **Project Partners**
<http://www.dundee.ac.uk/geddesinstitute/connected.htm>

Key words

Architecture Community Urban Sub-urban Housing Place Space Landmark



Oscar Marzaroli *'Gorbals, with Southern Necropolis Beyond'*, 1964

1. The challenge of research

The single biggest challenge facing architecture in the University system today is the challenge of research. Architecture must prove to the academic community that it constitutes research, and thereby garner the prestige of the other disciplines and the additional funding to supplement its teaching budgets. There has been research in building technology for a long time – most of us are familiar with the Building Research Establishment, and more recently with the sustainability agenda in which architecture plays a role. While this is important work, technology is a component of, and not central to, the discourse and practice of architecture. Architecture is fundamentally about creating and shaping space for inhabitation through the complex reiterative process of drawing plans. Architecture as a design practice in which many disparate considerations - including the social, the economic, the subjective, and the technological - are synthesised and resolved in a single plan with a clear hierarchy of intention and formal and spatial intelligibility, has yet to fully legitimise itself to the academic community as a form of research.

2. Cross Council research

Architecture><Community is a research project in the AHRC Connected Communities Research Program. The Connected Communities program is an interdisciplinary platform for the study of **communities, the forces that cohere them, and that pull them apart. Its purpose is 'to understand the changing nature of communities, in their historical and cultural contexts, and**

the value of communities in sustaining and enhancing our quality of life.' Its vision is 'to mobilise the potential for increasingly inter-connected, culturally diverse, communities to enhance participation, prosperity, sustainability, health & well-being by better connecting **research, stakeholders and communities.**'¹ It has participation from all the research councils, which leads us to believe that it is intended to be comprehensive, in the sense that the work of the poet, the home-builder, and the infrastructure engineer could be seen equally to contribute to communities. To the archaic Greeks, Homer was infrastructure. This program is still evolving. Our project is one of several score ongoing projects whose purpose is to define the scope and agendas of the program in advance of rolling the program out to a wider audience.

3. The lacunae of architecture

Architects have long felt that despite the salient position of architecture as the form-giver and image-maker of our social environment, architecture is rarely discussed in debates about communities, their identities and the ties that hold them together. Walter Benjamin argued that we receive architecture - unlike painting - in a state of distraction.² We never notice our ambient environment until it starts to change. Architecture is under-represented in research council funding and in academic strategic research funding frameworks. It is frequently misunderstood in the disciplines that deal with communities. They tend to discuss architecture in terms that are quite foreign to architects, or in terms that to an architect are quite impoverished, such as distance to amenities. And there is a lack of investment in architectural input to decision-making at the policy level. We argue that there is a gap, a disconnect, a lacuna in the discourse of communities and that lacuna is architecture. This project aims to substantiate the claims made herein about architecture's importance to community discourse, and illuminate this lacuna in the discourse, by reviewing the literature on architecture and communities in every discipline of the humanities and social sciences **except** architecture. Our aim is to raise awareness of the need for greater involvement of architecture in AHRC funding programs and to suggest roles for architecture in community focused research.³

¹ Both quotes accessed 14:34 hours, Sunday 25 September 2011, on the AHRC website, <http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/FundingOpportunities/Pages/connectedcommunities.aspx>

² Walter Benjamin, 'The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction (1936)' in Benjamin, *Illuminations* (Fontana, London, 1973).

³ An anecdote will suffice. The Je-S form organises research into a three tiered system of research areas in their 'Proposal Classifications' section. There are 78 primary research areas including Visual Arts with 12 subcategories, Dance with 5, Drama with 6, and Design with 6. Architecture appears as one of these 6 subcategory research areas under Design, and this subcategory encompasses all the practices and histories and theories of architecture with no further subdivisions. There is no other research classification for the spatial environment, built or unbuilt. This is disproportionate, given that the city is the single biggest, most complex design artefact in the history of civilisation. Visual artists and dancers and actors have been more vocal advocates to the research community than architects have. Under design engineering, another subcategory with architecture under Design, there are 23 third-level subject areas, including Design of Built Infrastructure, and Design for Healthcare that should probably fall under architecture. Another subcategory **neighbour, Design Processes**, includes minutiae like: Design Innovation, Design Management, **Inclusive Design, and Creativity in Design (is there any other kind?). When you put 'architecture' in the search field**, six primary research areas pop up, encompassing 36 third level subject areas. Except for the architecture subcategory under Design, the others have to do with information, computing, and software. In other words, architecture has been absorbed into 36 other disciplines as a model for a system whose salient feature is that it combines a formal and conceptual structure, but it has almost disappeared in its own right.

4. What we did

The aim of this project was to produce a picture of the role of architecture in the humanities and social sciences research into communities and to point to areas of future research to which architecture could contribute. To this end, it had five components:

- We conducted a keyword search in the humanities and social sciences databases using **our university's CrossSearch function to produce a horizontal audit of contemporary papers** in key humanities and social sciences journals. We also selectively used Google Scholar and **publishers' own databases. Where abstracts were available we were able to limit selections** for sample readings. The disciplines we searched were sociology psychology, psychoanalysis, geography, politics, philosophy, economics, and history. The resulting lists are in the appendices, along with notes about details of the CrossSearch procedure. We accepted from that outset that a comprehensive survey of all the disciplines was too vast, and we allowed the search to focus down based on our interests and a sense of where the literature was leading us.
- Along side this literature review, we produced the paper *Architecture and its Communities* [appendix 3], as an historical overview of the literature which synthesises and understands the role of architecture in building communities, and its position in humanities and social science discourses. We have situated this research within a broader discussion of the history and culture of architecture. This project is essentially discipline based, because the disciplines remain the prime infrastructure of academic communities.
- The objective of the *IJburg Case Study* is to bring the discussion of disciplinary collaboration home to the practice of architecture. IJburg is a neighbourhood built on a new island adjacent Amsterdam that will comprise 7,000 homes, 22,000 residents. It is currently half complete. We studied the design and procurement process and visited Amsterdam to interview its key players. Its procurement process involved political idea about urbanity and social mix; what social science research was done was based on previous projects by the architects and planners who designed it. IJburg is regarded as a world-class development in contemporary housing.
- The objectives of the symposium were twofold. We used the symposium to present the *IJburg Case Study* and *Architecture and its Communities* to our network of colleagues in the humanities and social sciences for their review and comment. Their comments are reflected in this report. A number of them are involved in Connected Communities projects. A second objective was to scope out future research projects involving architecture and the humanities/social sciences that can be submitted for funding under the AHRC Connected Communities highlight notice. The day was therefore divided into two sessions. The symposium program, including statements by the participants is included in this submission [appendix 4].
- Finally, proposals for research, in which we classify different sorts of architecture research with selective commentary; this includes a developed case study for collaborative research between architecture and psychoanalysis.

5. World Trade Towers, New York + IJburg, Amsterdam



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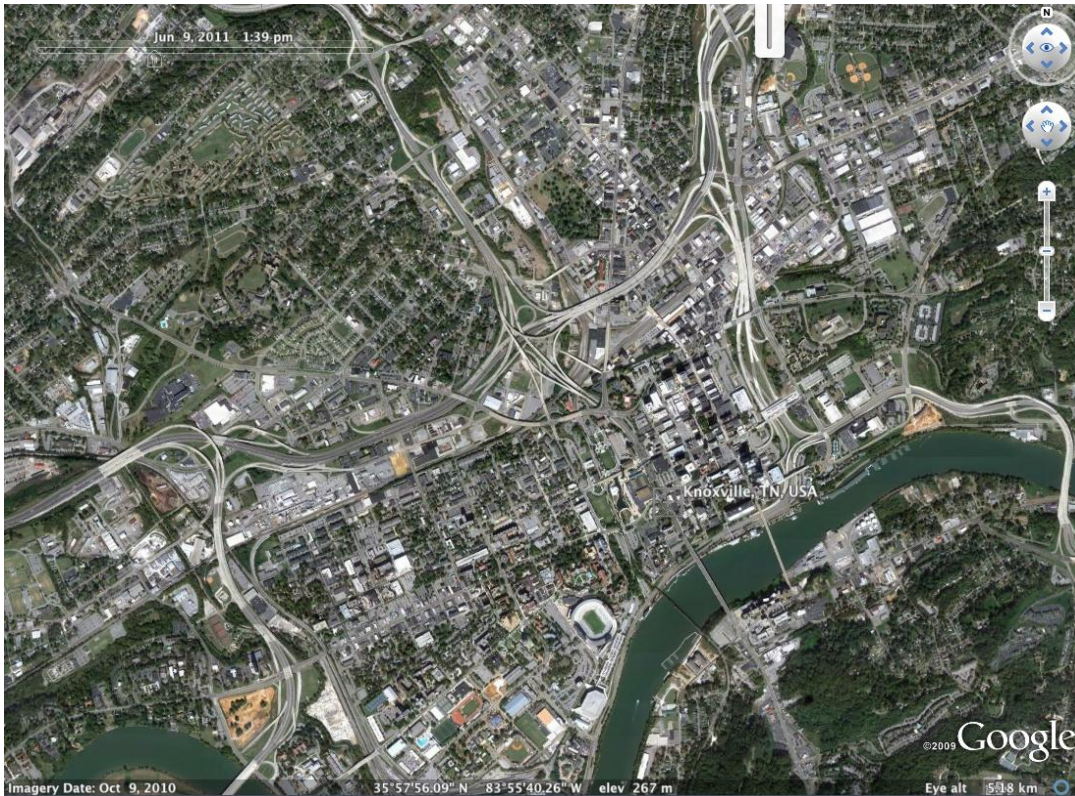
These images of the World Trade Towers and IJburg under construction became iconic for this project because they speak to the myriad roles of architecture in the formation of communities. The one is symbolic, based on the image of the object, the other territorial or place-based. (The differences are supported by other formal relations: vertical versus horizontal, street view looking up versus aerial view looking down). A word about the Towers.

Our case for support opens with a reference to the 'enduring phallic grandeur of the World Trade Towers' in order to underscore the fact that architecture – at least in so far as it is a catalyst for social formations – is irreducible to quantification, cost, and simple accounts of use and function. One of the casualties of 9/11 was a collective memory. What no one remembers is that those two towers were resented by most New Yorkers as a blemish on the skyline. This bland symbol of economic power was an attractor of envy and loathing. It is not possible to account for its effect on communities without taken account of its material and spatial qualities, the way it floats above the skyline visible from everywhere, in a word, without surveying its bland and complacent 'look'.

It is well known that the Tower site was contested territory for communities at loggerheads – politically empowered financial interests won out over a dense ethnic community and thriving cottage industry, despite vocal protests by local residents and businesses, planners, and architects. But it was as a material image that these towers were most powerful in galvanising **the identities of communities: in the 1970's and 80, for New Yorkers, they were the image of corporate greed; in 2001, for Islamic agitators, the image of American capitalist culture; subsequently for Americans (in so far as Americans are represented by their foreign policy), a form of American manifest destiny.** Architecture is concerned with the material presence of

objects and spaces. It is in this register of quality - precisely what the audit misses - that it is the platform for communities.

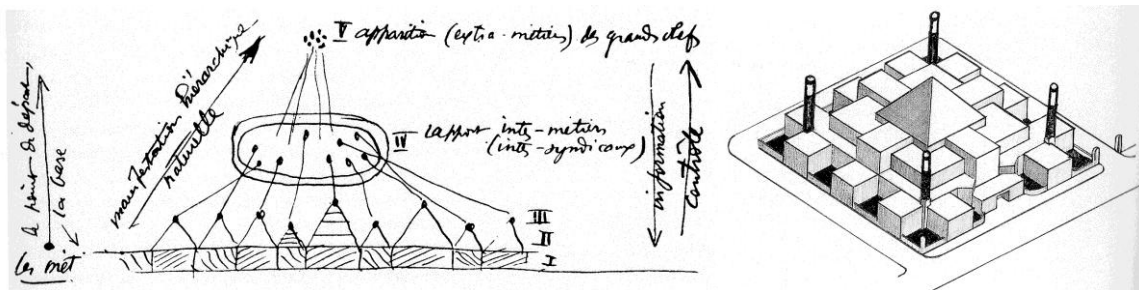
6. Childhood's End



Knoxville raises the question of cohesion for whom? cohesion for what community? The interstate system built for the integrity of a community that is both territorial and symbolic called America, has carved up a city. If this is an image of a form of cohesiveness, then it is one that operates only on a large scale. Most of us see it as an image of communities fractured. From the point of view of the individual who lives in a neighbourhood now bisected by this road, it is the opposite of cohesion. This leads us to suggest that the cohesion of the community of individuals is gradually being left behind in favour of higher orders of cohesion. In Hegelian terms, individual consciousness as we know it and as it is cherished in the arts may be coming to an end, and being replaced by collective consciousness that knows nothing of the individual and from which the individual is alienated. Individual consciousness has a finite period in the development of humans with respect to an environment, and it may give way to what the Louis Mumford called the mega-machine. In images such as this one, we may

be witnessing its finiteness. To go further would move into the territory of science fiction which is not a subject we are able to theorise.⁴

7. The Way Forward: Architecture >< Humanities Research into Urban and Rural Environments



©Fondation Le Corbusier, Paris

Most issues addressing communities today can be thought spatially. Architectural thinking has the capacity to clearly articulate social formations and power relations through spatial means. These two sketches by Le Corbusier demonstrate his form-driven thinking about authority, power, and social and work relations. On the left is a diagram showing a 'Regional-Syndicalist system of government, 1933, based on power springing from work organisations or metiers, and delegated to a confederation. Control is exerted from below, information from above.' On the right, a diagram showing *ateliers d'art*, 1910, in which 'eleven workshops and gardens surround a covered pyramidal communal space for lectures and exhibits...' Again, a form for collective organisation and power.⁵

Design

The core practice of architecture is the design of spaces for inhabitation. This includes the design of buildings, the spaces between buildings, spaces without buildings, conglomerations of buildings, parts of buildings (inglenooks, details, the parts of buildings we touch, the parts we never touch), and other aspects of the built environment. Architecture has the capacity to imagine new forms of living, new patterns of occupation of the surface of the earth, new spatial and aesthetic and social relations. It is a concrete form of the imaginary. Architectural design is one of the forms of research that puts something new and material into the world. In 1923, Le Corbusier wrote 'The plan is the generator. Without a plan you have lack of order.... The plan holds in itself the essence of sensation.' Architecture is a design practice, in which

⁴ Arthur C. Clarke's *Childhood's End* (1953) is about the evolution of earth from a material to an all energy state that began with its invasion by a peace-keeping force of aliens. Louis Mumford the great modernist historian of civilisation and friend of the polymathic botanist planner Patrick Geddes coined the term mega-machine in *Technics and Civilisation* (1934) to describe the co-linear rise of all pervasive state-apparatuses, technology, and state-planning.

⁵ Images and quotes taken from Charles Jencks, *Le Corbusier and the continual revolution in architecture* (New York: Monacelli Press, 2000).

many disparate considerations - including the social, formal, historical, material, economic, subjective, and technological - are synthesised and resolved in a single plan with a clear hierarchy of intention, and formal and spatial intelligibility. The acid test of the research proposition is the resolution, clarity, and beauty of the plan. It is through plan resolution that complex ideas and proposition are researched and tested.⁶

The role that architectural design can play in community focused research projects in the humanities has two principal steps:

- spatial mapping of the existing fabric of the environment
- proposals for alterations to that fabric in collaboration with residents and other agencies.

Mapping

Spatial mapping is an analytic method developed by architects, in which we survey, analyse, and depict a wide range of phenomena, including public and private space and their interactions, relationships of internal and external spaces and relationships to historical spaces. While these have their roots in physical characteristics, they embody and represent personal and social relationships. A series of mapping exercises can identify these phenomena, as a way of understanding and representing the personal and social realms within a given study area. The outcome is a series of maps, plans, drawings, photographs and conceptual models that reveal the narratives and beauty of the built urban or rural environment. Starting from these spatial mapping exercises, and working with residents and other agencies, architects can develop an understanding of how personal and public space and, for example, the thresholds between them, may be defined and managed, all within the statutory and contractual frameworks of building (planning law, building regulations). Architecture can develop proposals in drawings, models, animations, film, exhibitions, and other media, to alter the physical fabric of a neighbourhood. Although mapping is usually associated with evidence-based research (correlating data with spatial grids), it can also map important aspects of communities, which will never emerge as evidence: architecture can map and thereby spatialise the hopes, dreams, aspirations, affections, fears of a community, it can ask what if, it can map the counterfactual conditional, it has the capacity to imagine new possibilities for living. In this way, by these two steps, starting with the ordinary and everyday, we are able to capture the possible, the oneiric, the phantasmagoric, even; and by so doing, make visible what is not yet there, what may never be there, but what could be.

For a Research Statement that classifies types of architecture research and a Research Case Study on interdisciplinary architecture >< psychoanalysis research, please see Appendixes 1&2 following.

⁶ We are using the word 'plan' as a metonym for all the methods that contribute to design, including the production of sketches, sections, elevations, depth drawings, models, film, photography. Le Corbusier, quote from *Vers une Architecture* (1923). In this sense, research in architecture is similar to research in philosophy. In philosophy, a complex series of ideas are resolved in a clear and elegant philosophical argument.

8. **Conclude: Architects**

Although architects are not responsible for most of the environment, built or unbuilt, and play little role in policy-making, we are generally assumed to have a highly informed understanding **of how the environment works. We are its 'expert witnesses'. This is because what we do when we design a building or a space is model possible relationships between the environment, the socius, and the self.** Each public building is a possible model of social relations, each public building is an essay in civility. Each house is a possible model in the relation of the self to the environment. And while not every building by an architect does this, it is nevertheless the yardstick by which we are measured.

References and external links

Appendix 1: Architecture Research Statement

Appendix 2: Research Case Study & Bibliography: architecture >< psychoanalysis

Appendix 3: Research Paper: Architecture and its Communities

Appendix 4: Project Partners

For **Appendices 1-4** please see the website of the Geddes Institute for Urban Research at <http://www.dundee.ac.uk/geddesinstitute/connected.htm>

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The Connected Communities

Connected Communities is a cross-Council Programme being led by the AHRC in partnership with the EPSRC, ESRC, MRC and NERC and a range of external partners. The current vision for the Programme is:

"to mobilise the potential for increasingly inter-connected, culturally diverse, communities to enhance participation, prosperity, sustainability, health & well-being by better connecting research, stakeholders and communities."

Further details about the Programme can be found on the AHRC's Connected Communities web pages at:

www.ahrc.ac.uk/FundingOpportunities/Pages/connectedcommunities.aspx

