



**Yale University, School of Architecture**

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STOP CITY

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# STOP CITY

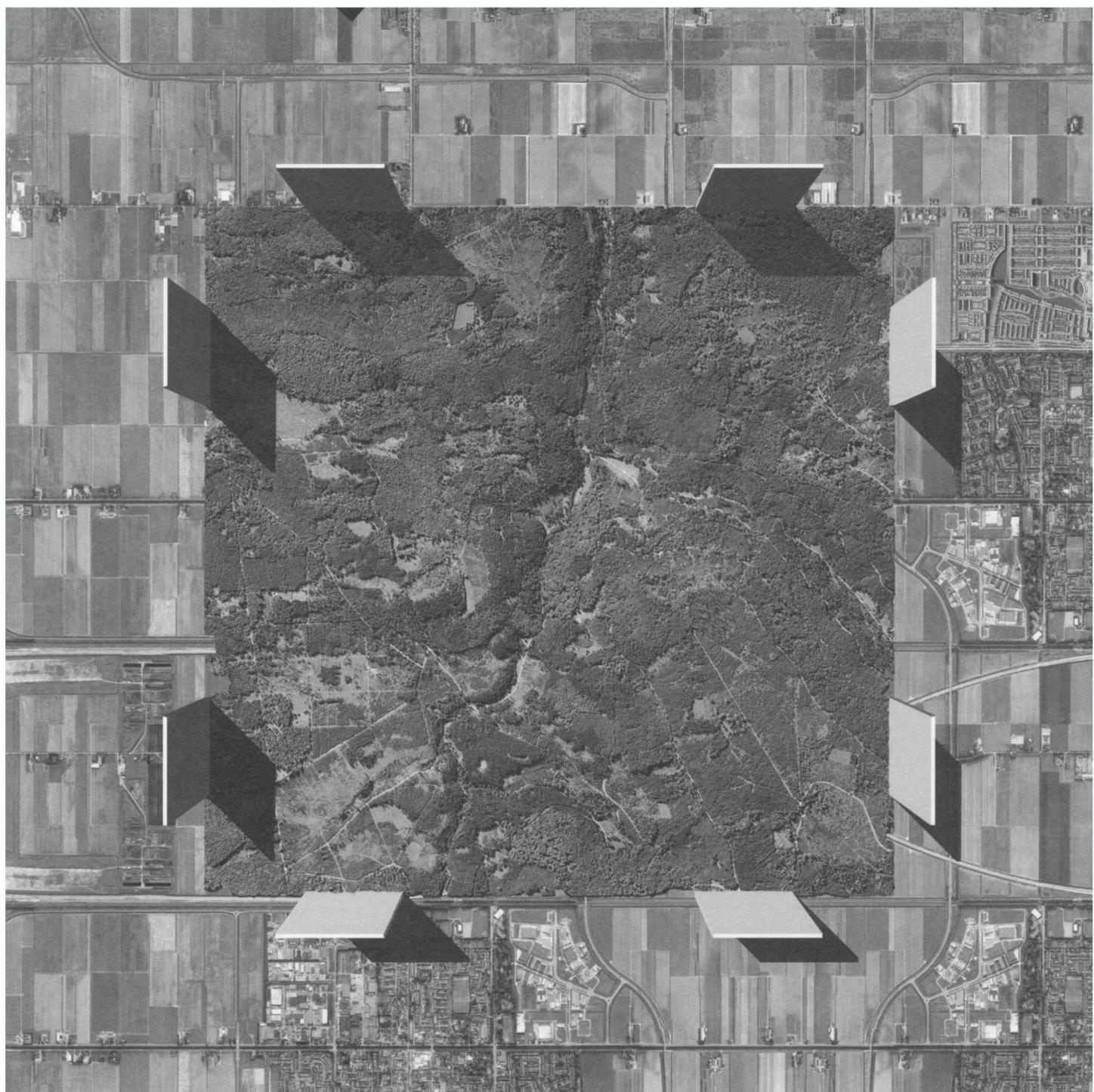


Fig.1 Aerial view.

**DOGMA: PIER VITTORIO AURELI AND MARTINO TATTARA**

## 1

In a provocative text written a few years ago, the Italian philosopher Paolo Virno<sup>1</sup> describes contemporary fascism as the way in which economic power seizes and orchestrates the totality of subjectivity in order to reproduce itself—i.e., it disregards the prior utility of “top-down” power and, instead, takes kaleidoscopic forms and a sense of existential instability as a means to metropolitan life. Virno goes on to describe contemporary fascism as the “twin brother” of the most radical instances of social newness that emerged within the crisis of modern forms of labor, namely Fordist modes of production. As such, fascism today has become the political machine used to organize the informal social patterns that escape intelligible categorization. In Europe, economic power extends the possibility of management and reproduction within the most progressive forms of “bottom-up” creativity, participation, and informality. It is by understanding the deeply political nature of this social context, and the way in which flexibility has become the most powerful way of gaining control over the city and its conflicts, that we may be able to explain the critical fortune of a concept such as *informal urbanism*. Within this concept lies an ideology that aims to render capitalism’s uneven geography of redistribution—its systematic de-regulation and laissez-faire policies—as the natural, “spontaneous,” and thus acceptable evolution of the city.

As a critique of such rhetoric and the way it has been represented by architects and urban designers within the recent avalanche of so-called bottom-up strategies for the “informal city,” we must re-invest the architectural project with its (proper) mission: to establish a principal order by which to frame and construct forms of inhabitation. Yet, we understand the project of the city not as the ubiquitous design and management of its inhabitation but rather as the rethinking of a controversial topic that in recent years has become taboo: defining the form of the city. The project presented here considers the problem of the form of the city not only in terms of its morphological appearance, but also within the broader political concept of form—that is, the concept of *limit*.

Understanding and utilizing the *limit* through the production of an architectural project acquires two levels of meaning: first, it refers to the physical space contained by the limit, namely establishing the constraints and processes of stoppage to the endless growth of the city; secondly, in more conceptual terms, it refers to the idea that architecture should turn its back to the drama of *newness* and define—with conceptual clarity and formal exemplarity—the prototypical forms of density, i.e., spaces for living and working that counteract the lifestyle of individualism and laissez-fare governance propelled by neo-liberal urban policies.

The richness and multiplicity of meaning in the concept of *limit* finds its origin in the ambivalence of the simple act of marking a limit. If the concept of limit represents the beginning of every human settlement on the one hand, it is also, as Carl Schmitt affirmed in his seminal work on the “*jus publicum Europaeum*,” the genesis of any form of jurisdiction. Marking the land and tracing the limit are not only the primordial forms of establishing the settlement form; their consequences extend to the possibility of the coexistence of people and power formations of every sort, which are always “founded on new spatial divisions, new enclosures, and new spatial orders of the earth.”<sup>2</sup>

We have decided to address the possibility of the project of the limit of the city by means of our own tools: through drawings and text. The proposal that we present here is part of ongoing research for a city model called *Stop City*.

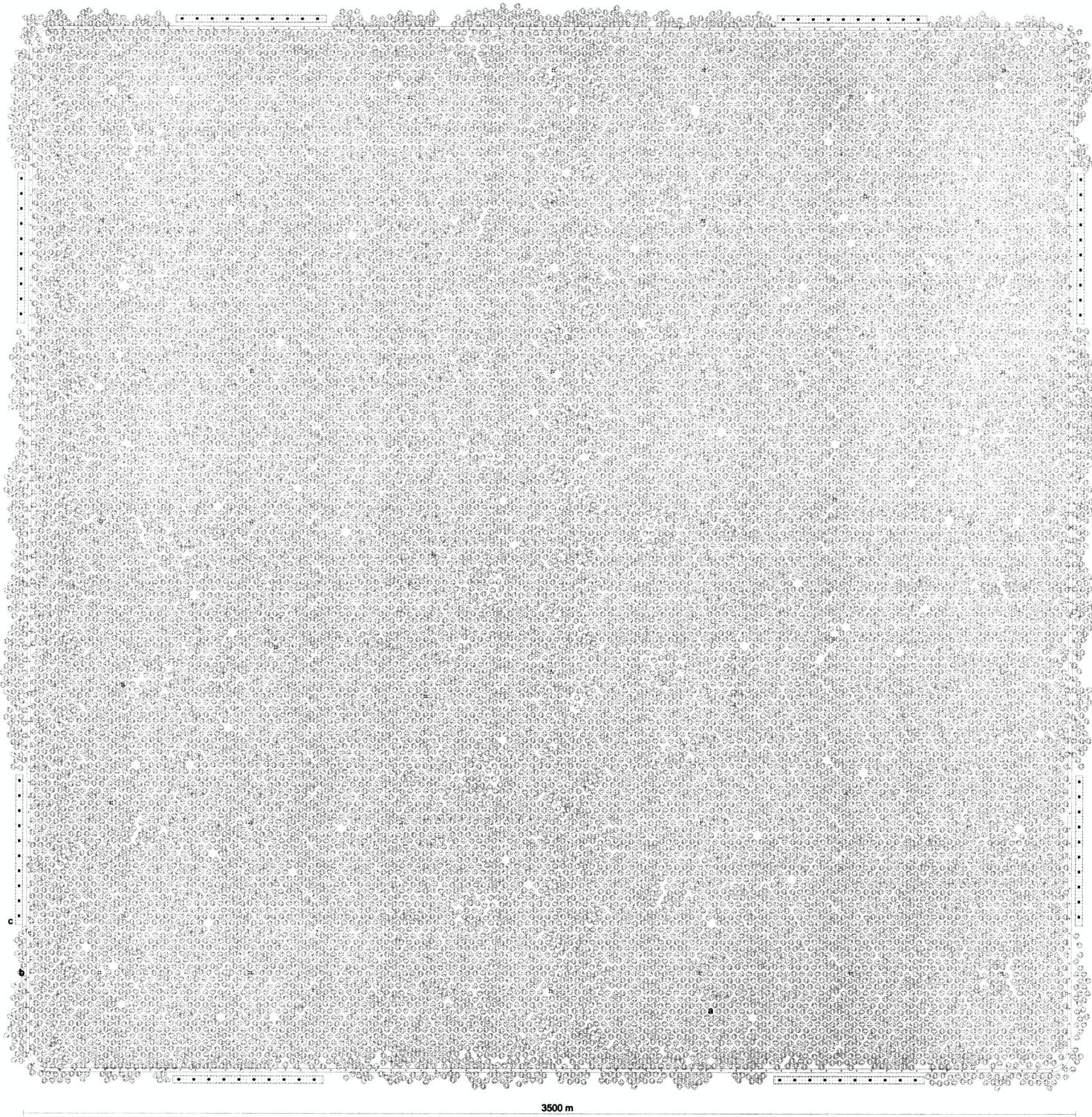
## 2

*Stop City* is the hypothesis for a non-figurative architectural language for the city. By formalizing the border that separates urbanization from empty space, *Stop City* proposes an absolute limit—and thus, the very form of the city. *Stop City* develops vertically. *Stop City* is an archipelago of islands of high density. The growth of *Stop City* happens by virtue of its limit, i.e., by the repetition of the basic unit, which is a city of 500,000 inhabitants made of eight slabs measuring 500 by 500 meters, 25 meters thick. These eight slabs are positioned on the border of a square with a side length of 3 kilometers, thus demarcating an “empty” area. Each slab is a “city within the city,” an *immeuble cité* which is, in itself, self-sufficient and resists characterization by any specific program or activity, enabling the support of multiple programs or activities.

Given the extreme height of each *immeuble cité* and the overall density of inhabitants, mobility within and between becomes more crucial than the single dwelling. Several means of vertical and horizontal transportation at different speeds are deployed to allow for convenient movements between the city parts (floors) and among the *immeuble cité*. Similar to the contemporary city,

<sup>1</sup> Paolo Virno, “Theses on the New European Fascism,” *Greyroom* 21 (2005): 21–25.

<sup>2</sup> Carl Schmitt, *The Nomos of the Earth in the International Law of Jus Publicum Europaeum* (New York: Telos Press, 2003), 79.



**Fig.2** Typical plan:  
a. Canopy (forest);  
b. Entrance (ring metro);  
c. Phalanstery (unit for 60000 inhabitants).

## Stop City

transportation becomes a device to establish hierarchies, rhythms, and new possibilities in the way inhabitants experience urban space. The *immeuble cité* has no elevation: its face presents the vertical array of floor slabs with the free distribution and position of rooms in each floor. The square defined by the eight slabs positioned along its perimeter is empty, a simple urban void filled by a forest. This horizontal canopy of densely planted trees represents the limit against urbanization; thus, it renders the very form of *Stop City*.

*Stop City* refrains from architecture; it is a model of a city in which there is no architecture, as traditionally intended; there is only the attempt to architecturally frame the city.

Our proposal pursues the idea of an *ohne Eigenschaften* architecture—an architecture without attributes—in other words, an architecture that is freed from image, from style, from the obligation to extravagance, from the useless invention of new forms. *Stop City* is architecture freed from itself; it is the form of the city.

### 3

In the 1930s, when capitalism was being restructured after the crisis of 1929, Walter Benjamin critically assessed an early form of capitalist power—the architecture of Parisian arcades—as a precondition for class emancipation *after* the crisis of capitalism.<sup>3</sup> Writing on his *Arcades Project*, Susan Buck-Morss has said that “the *Passagen-Werk* is a historical lexicon of the capitalist origins of modernity, a collection of concrete, factual images of urban experiences... [Benjamin’s] method was to create from them constructions of print that had the power to awaken political consciousness among present-day readers.”<sup>4</sup> In the same way Benjamin appropriated the pre-existing architectural form of the urban arcades in order to critically elucidate the terms of capitalism during his time, *Stop City* critically (and polemically) appropriates Archizoom’s model of homogeneous urbanization—*No-Stop City* (1968–72)—at the moment in which the premise of their project is no longer a (utopian) projection but rather an acute and sarcastic retrospective map of the reality in which we live.

*No-Stop City* reduced the capitalist city to a continuous urban field with the intent of dissolving the built structure of the city into its constitutive, infrastructural elements—column, elevator, wall, etc.—and envisioning the city as a vast, artificially lit, air-conditioned interior.<sup>5</sup> Differences such as inside and outside, landscape and city, production and consumption, and living and working were collapsed into one neutral yet totalizing surface that was extendable in all directions on an underlying grid that represented the most generic order possible. Contrary to the many utopian projects of that time, *No-Stop City* was meant to be a hyperrealistic project: *the city is what it does*. It is the continuous ambiance made by repetitive conditions of light, communication, air-conditioning, mechanized transportation, and all of the social connections—material and immaterial—that were needed in order to enable its own operation, sustenance, and reproduction. Thus *No-Stop City* formalized the conditions that make the city.

Neither a proposal for a new city nor a utopian transformation of the existing city, *No-Stop City* was meant to be a conceptual X-ray of the existing capitalist metropolis, in which the

3  
See Walter Benjamin, *Das Passagen-Werk* in Gesammelte Schriften, vol. V (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1991).

4  
Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* (Cambridge, MA, and London: MIT Press, 1991), 336.

5  
The theses concerning what later Archizoom called No-Stop City were presented already in 1970 in the pages of Casabella with the significant title, “Città, Catena di Montaggio del Sociale” (City, assembly line of the social). The final version of the project was first published as “No-Stop City: Residential Parkings, Climatic Universal System” in 1971 on the pages of the magazine Domus. See Archizoom Associati, “Città, Catena di Montaggio del Sociale: Ideologia e Teoria della Metropoli,” Casabella, nos. 350–51 (1970); Archizoom Associati, “No-Stop City: Residential Parkings, Climatic Universal System,” Domus, no. 496 (1971). For a detailed description of the project see Andrea Branzi, *No-Stop City* (Paris: Editions HYX, 2006), which contains English translations of the magazine texts.

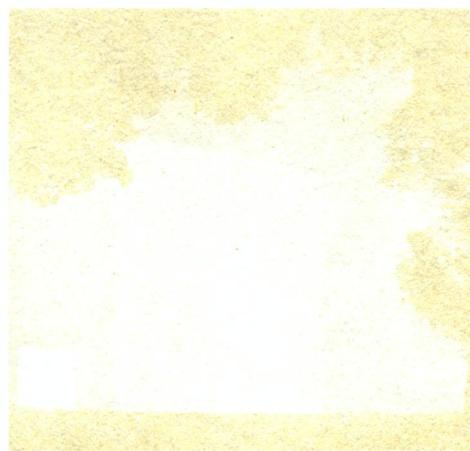


Fig.3 Architectural form will be there before being something, and it will be there after: hard and unalterable, relentlessly mocking its own meaning, its function, program, content, images, style, clients, representations, pretensions. The essence of architectural form lies in its obstructiveness. (Repr. p.180)

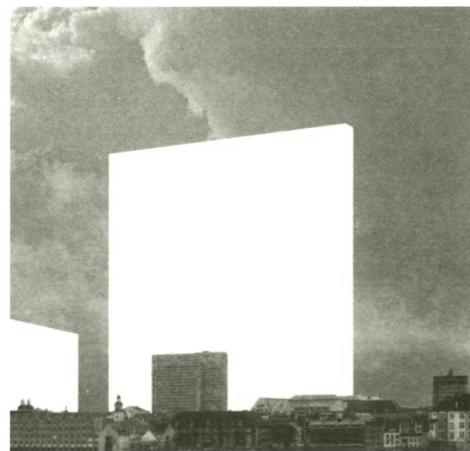


Fig.4 Architectural form works as a strategy simply by existing; it is there to advance its context, not itself. It does not offer endless and unfocused possibility, but establishes limits. Its dictatorial framing is only unbalanced by the city, whose uncanny nature and contents it seeks to civilize.

conditions for reproduction were no longer localized in specific sectors, such as the industrial, housing, and civic spaces, but proliferated everywhere. In this scenario, the iconoclastic form of *No-Stop City* can be understood as a merciless *memento mori* for architecture as a shape-maker and producer of difference. Within the objective conditions of the metropolis, formal complexity becomes ideological and operates on the level of a false consciousness that pretends to explain the instrumentality of the city with futile formal gestures. For this reason *No-Stop City* was not an avant-garde project, nor was it an antimodernist project; instead it offered a hypothesis that attempted to radically bring to terms the very premise of modernity—the project for a generic city in which living is reduced to bio-political mechanisms of production and reproduction. For this reason *No-Stop City* should be read as the continuation (and critical exaggeration) of the urban research tradition undertaken by planners such as Ildefonso Cerdà in the nineteenth century and Ludwig Hilberseimer in the first half of the twentieth century.

Instead of planning the city by means of architectural figures, Cerdà established his extension of the city of Barcelona by focusing on the bio-political management of the city through measures such as demographic control, infrastructure, and zoning. This strategy resulted in a non-figurative design of the city.<sup>6</sup> City form was reduced to an isotropic and thus extendable grid, which articulated the equal distribution of services and roads throughout the city. A religious center appears in every nine-block district, a marketplace every four blocks, a park every eight, a hospital every sixteen...and the formula continues. For Cerdà the city was *urbanization*: the potentially limitless growth of the city by means of production and reproduction.<sup>7</sup> Subsequently the act of planning urbanization became a reformist project in which amelioration of the workers' living conditions inevitably coincided with the containment of their political subjectivity. This containment was defined as the possibility of urbanization and was to be considered a continuous process of the expansion of its own logic, perpetually proliferating all aspects of life.

With his city plans and theoretical writings, Hilberseimer gave an even more radical interpretation of urbanization. He asserted that the effects of capitalism on the organization of the city were reformable only by assuming, as a principle of urban design, capitalism's most extreme cultural conditions: uprootedness and the generic quality of urban space. Hilberseimer manifested these conditions in his plans for territorial settlements—from his *Vertical City* (1927) to his proposal for the American *New Regional Pattern* (1949)—by advancing an architectural form on the verge of its disappearance, one made of generic and repeatable elements.

Archizoom's *No-Stop City* was not simply a radical accommodation of this legacy but also its class critique. Following the idea that the working class is strongest only at the level of its utmost alienation, Archizoom strategically adopted the radical reformism of Hilberseimer, not as simple amelioration but as a working-class appropriation of the urban condition. This "appropriation" existed in the possibility for the inhabitants to be confronted by not only the reformation of the urban environment but also with a straightforward and didactic architectural translation of such reform, liberated from the rhetorical forms of humanitarian socialism and rendered in its literal terms of a (political) framework for life.

<sup>6</sup> Which was exposed a few years later in the fundamental book *Teoría General de la Urbanización* (1867). See Ildefonso Cerdà, *General Theory of Urbanization* (Barcelona: Electa Spain, 1992).

<sup>7</sup> Ildefonso Cerdà was the inventor of the term *urbanization*.

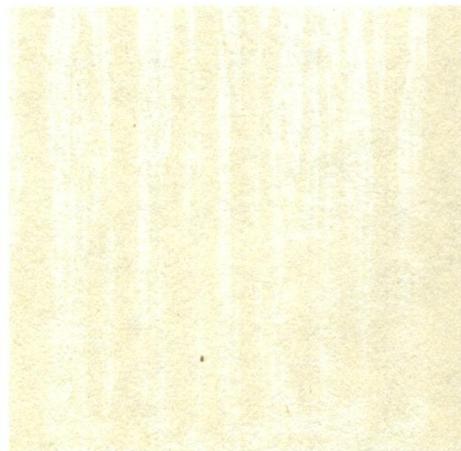


Fig.5 Horizontal plan (forest). (Repr. p.181)

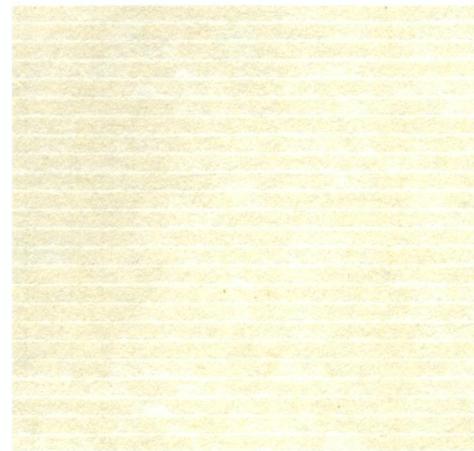


Fig.6 Vertical city detail. (Repr. p.181)

Stop City

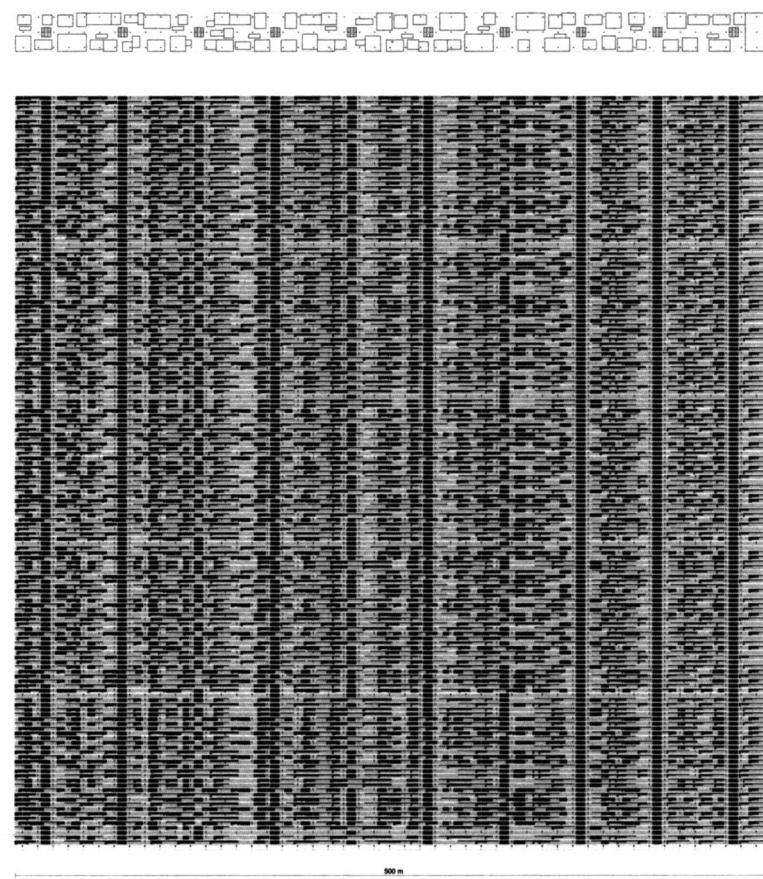


Fig.7 Typical plan and elevation of the unit for 60,000 inhabitants.

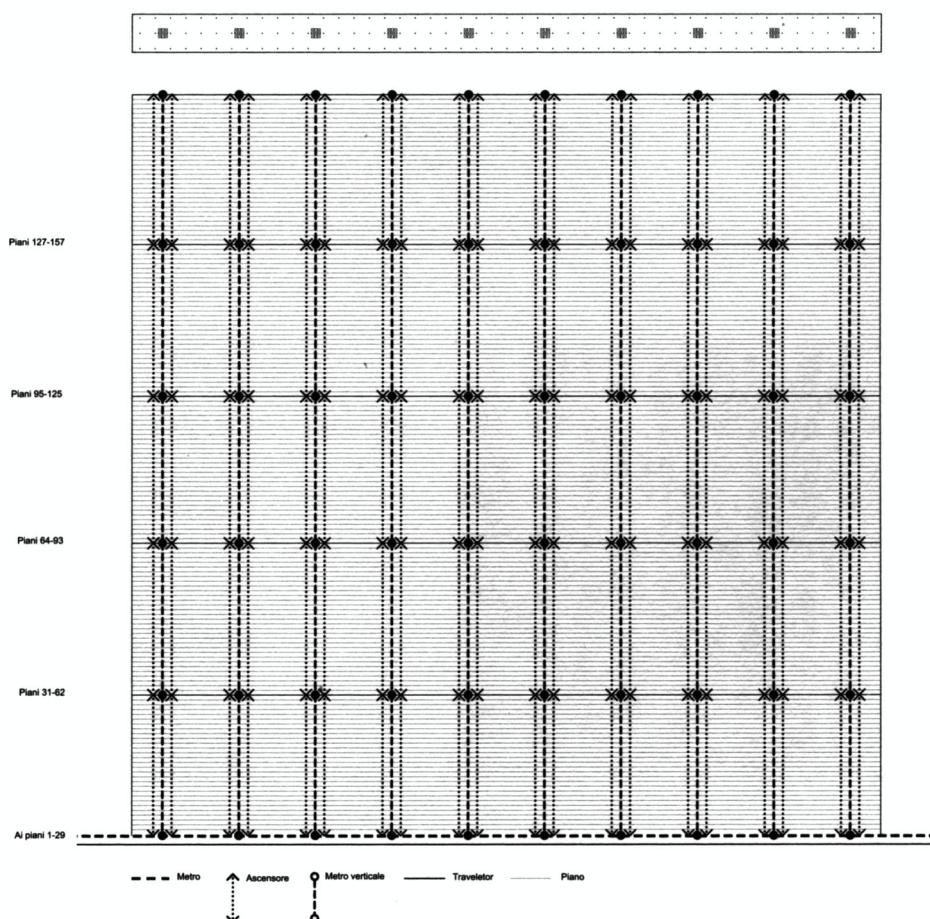


Fig.8 Diagram of mobility and distribution in a unit for 60,000 inhabitants.

Almost forty years after *No-Stop City*, our proposal for *Stop City* appropriates and continues the non-figurative language developed by Cerdà, Hilberseimer, and Archizoom. However, it completely reverses their urban theses. If Cerdà, Hilberseimer, and Archizoom conceived of the city as formless and limitless—as *urbanization*—our project, by assuming the form of a border that separates urbanization from void space, positions itself as an absolute limit, and therefore as the form of the city itself.

The main thesis of *Stop City* stems from the observation that today the relationship between those who live and work in the city and the city itself recalls the relationship that workers once had with the factory during the era of industrial expansion.<sup>8</sup> If the factory was dominated by the spatially and temporally choreographed rhythm of the assembly line, today's cities are dominated by the pervasive informality of social relationships, which subsume every aspect of human communication and cognition as a factor of production. In other words, the contemporary city, in spite of its increasing complexities, contradictions, and informalities, has been reduced to the contemporary factory, and its inhabitants have (potentially) become the new working class. This is evident if we consider the fact that capitalistic production has historically and radically evolved by expanding its domain from the manufacturing of goods to the production of services such as communication, education, and cultural exchange. Production occurs not only in terms of what we traditionally understand as labor-related activities, but tends to leak into the whole spectrum of social activities related to culture, media, education, and all the other bio-political means of life (re)production. In this context the optimistic and harmonious representation of the multiplication of identities and subjectivities that characterize the social and political landscape of post-Fordism—and that sociologists, artists, and architects effortlessly map, analyze, and celebrate as the triumph of diversity and difference—represents a great mystification. Behind the superficial praise for (and facile image of) multiplicity, the mystification concerns the pervasiveness of work within the entire spectrum of social relationships, implying an ethos made of increasingly generic uprootedness and abstraction within which contemporary forms of production actualize their processes within society. Urban theories and social analyses that overlook this reality produce the same kind of rhetoric rehearsed by images of the city as a site of value-free congestion, leisure, spectacle, and consumption.

*Stop City* is a model for the city where the ubiquitous attributes of contemporary production such as genericness, uprootedness, and abstraction are not rejected in the name of some humanistic good intention but are radicalized to the extreme: they become the political and aesthetic surplus of the same attributes, and their legibility aims at stimulating a new class consciousness that may introduce stoppages—i.e., *limits*—within the continuous space of urbanization.

*Stop City* maintains that to propose projects at the scale of the entire city is to address the possibility of a political subject. We maintain that political subjects are not the by-product of socio-logical identity—lifestyles, groups, communities, social targets, etc.—but that political subjects are made from the balance of powers at stake. “Labor power” refers to the fact that anything that exists in society has to be productive and must be put to work; the workers, those who find themselves shaped by this condition of work, can potentially express a subjectivity that exceeds such social, cultural, and political boundaries. This excessive subjectivity cannot be proposed through architecture, but architecture can provoke this subjectivity to emerge and take a position. It is precisely within this framework that *Stop City* introduces the issue of *limit* as its main theme. The term *architecture* no longer implies growth, extension, multiplication, and flexibility, but rather is the practice that limits such possibilities. According to this logic, architecture does not become the design of everything, but it becomes what releases everything from being designed.

In 1970, *No-Stop City* prophesized total urbanization of the city. Today, *Stop City* suggests the beginning of a slow but inexorable comeback of the city against urbanization. If the urban perception of liberal democracy coincides with the theoretic premises of *No-Stop City*, namely diffusion, ubiquity, and individualization, the form of *Stop City* suggests the possibility of a new communitarian life that introduces a renewed spirit of secessionism within the smooth and totalizing spaces of urbanization. To imagine a form of communitarian life as the phenomenon of separation rather than one of universality means to imagine the limit within which each city life is constituted.

Against the taboo that form means to abdicate from a political vision of the city, *Stop City* intends to provide a *theory* (in the original, non-intellectual sense of the word *vision*) of political organization and of the city through the absolute form of an architectural project.

8  
See Antonio Negri,  
*Dalla Fabbrica alla  
Metropoli* (Rome:  
Datanews, 2008).

Fig.9 Interior view.  
(Repr. p.181)

**STOP CITY**

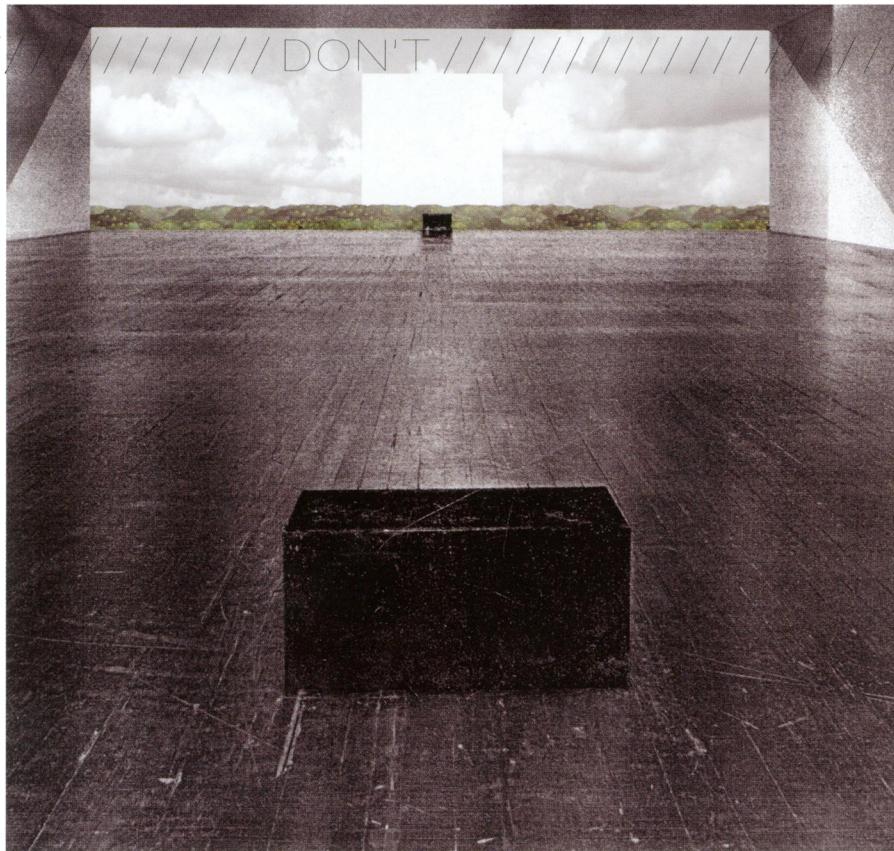


Fig.9 Interior view.



Fig.5 Horizontal plan (forest).

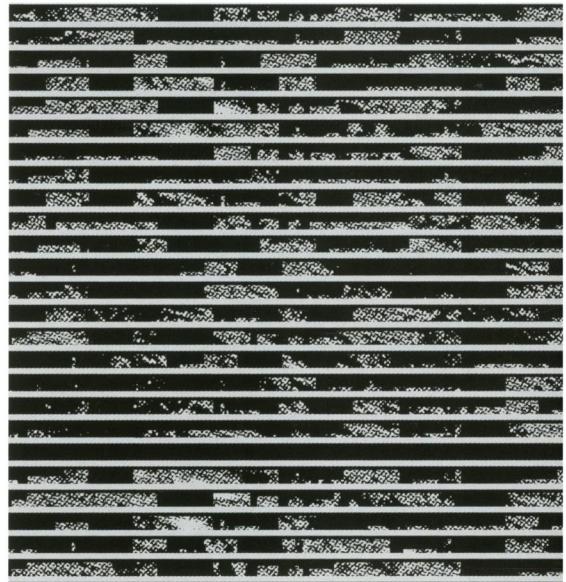


Fig.6 Vertical city detail.