

Preface

The Art of Assemblage and Deformation

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“The compound may be actually other than the constituents from which it has resulted.”
Aristotle, *On Generation and Corruption*, I, 10.

After two years finally the Proceedings of the XXVI International Seminar on Urban Form, Cities as Assemblages, which we organised from the 2nd to the 6th of July 2019 in Nicosia, Cyprus, have come to light. The Cyprus Network of Urban Morphology (CyNUM), which organised on behalf of ISUF the XXVI International Seminar on Urban Form, was founded in 2015 as a bicomunal organisation involving actively researchers from both sides of the divide (Camiz, 2017). Following the bicomunal spirit of CyNUM the conference took part both in the Republic of Cyprus and in the UN Buffer zone in Nicosia. Different sessions and events were distributed at the Filoxenia Conference Centre (Nicosia), at the Home for Cooperation (Buffer Zone), at Chateau status (Buffer Zone) and at the Goethe-Institut Cyprus (Buffer Zone). Unfortunately, it was not possible to organise a conference session within the northern side of the divide, we were able instead to plan a guided tour therein. Nevertheless, the conference, both symbolically and practically kept together the two sides of Cyprus. After the conference, came the pandemic, and this created a restraint to the proceedings' timeline. The reasons for this extensive delay should be clarified and are mostly due to the lockdowns adopted by most governments during the COVID-19 pandemic. These dramatically slowed down each step of the long list of actions required for a publication: the gathering of economic resources, the choice of a publisher, the collection of papers, the organisation and editing of the three volumes, the correction of proofs and finally the design of the volumes. In normal conditions each one of these steps could have taken a few months, but within the global lockdowns that we faced in 2020 and 2021, each one took from six to ten months. We edited the proceedings so to allow individual DOI and SCOPUS indexing for each paper. This last part of the process, which we decided to adopt from the very beginning, was indeed one of the reasons for the length of the entire operation: but we to believe that it was worth waiting. We can indeed now insert the proceedings of ISUF 2019 in the shortlist of the ISUF conference proceedings that have been SCOPUS indexed. We should mention as an example the XIX International Seminar on Urban Form, *New urban configurations*, which was held in Delft, The Netherlands, from the 16th to the 19th of October 2012 (Cavallo, Komossa, Marzot, Berghauser Pont and Kuijper 2014). As a note, the timeline for the publication of XIX International Seminar on Urban Form's proceedings

Delft (two years) does not differ from that of the XXVI International Seminar on Urban Form. We should indeed thank the conference's chair, Nadia Charalambous, for her rock-solid patience during the conference's organisation and in the long editing process of its proceedings.

We edited the proceedings by distributing uniformly the sessions dedicated to design and planning and the theoretical ones among the three volumes, so to not specialise each volume but to blend the different topics in an *assemblage* of theory and practice. This second volume contains the papers related to the conference sessions dedicated to: *Theory: Emergence, relations theories, the social sciences, and urban morphology*; *Methods: Embedding different approaches into the study of urban morphology*; *Urban Design: Urban morphology, building typology and design* and last, but not least, the special focus session entitled *Urban conflict and divided cities*. Obviously, it is not possible to mention all the authors in such a short space, so we remand to the volume's index and the individual papers for those details. Nevertheless, we will mention a few of them, so to represent here symbolically the topic of each session, and to illustrate briefly to the reader the wide scope of the XXVI International Seminar on Urban Form, both in provenance of the authors and in contents. We will also discuss briefly in the conclusions the different aspects of the *notion of assemblage*, and how they may be related to the conference's topics. Within the session, *Emergence, relations theories, the social sciences, and urban morphology*, we should mention Qi Mu's contribution, *A relational thought on the traditional rural settlements in China Taking Dawan village as a case study*, which examined the relations between physical spaces and social forms, outlining the role of local elites in the village preservation and development. Francois Racine considered the link between planned built environments and city forms in Canada, in the different case studies of Boyce-Viau, Quartier Saint-Sulpice, and Place Valois. This paper, entitled *The influence of urban design theories in the transformation of urban morphology: Montreal from 1956 to 2018*, recognised an emerging trend in the influence of morphological and typological analysis on the urban design process. Within the session *Methods: Embedding different approaches into the study of urban morphology*, Meng Zhou and Ying Zheng presented *The analysis on the evolution of the Old-type Lilong housings in Tianjin*, where using the Italian typology methods, they described the diachronic evolution and the variants of the Lilong courtyard house building type. In *Housing Estates and Ordinary Peripheries. Mapping Adaptability of Urban Forms*, Isabel Ezquerro, Carmen Diez-Medina and Javier Monclus examined the urban transformations of two housing estates in Zaragoza in the last fifty years and, by using a multi-scalar approach, outlined the importance of the recognizable urban parts in the urban design practice. Within the session, *Urban Design: Urban morphology, building typology and design*, Lian Tang and Wowo Ding, in the paper entitled *Analysis Method of Historical Urban Fabric for Urban Design*, studied the urban fabric of Nanjing's historical area, and adopting quantitative analysis methods, derived some indexes to be used for the urban design and regeneration practices. Chrystala Psathiti used a multi-layered and non-hierarchical multi-scale methodological approach, assembling axial map analysis, spacemate diagrams, J-graphs, ABCD spaces and other social correlations to analyse the morphology of secondary school buildings, in the paper entitled, *Assemblages and Built Form: The case of secondary school buildings in Cyprus*. Within the special session dedicated to *Urban conflict and divided cities*, Luchuan Deng and Feng Song used a two-agent model to analyse the boundary issue in paper titled *The relationship between power, morphological characteristic areas, and their boundaries: Case study on the conservation areas in Cardiff, Wales*. Finally in the paper entitled *The Emergence and Extinction of a City Dividing Line: Study on Urban Morphology Along the "Secondary Borderline" in Shenzhen, China*, Xia Liu examined the evolution of urban forms along the Shenzhen Secondary Borderline from 1980 to 2018, finding that these were strongly determined by the different economic models adopted on the sides of the divide.

In each of these papers, and more in general in the entire conference, the authors considered in depth the different aspects of *the notion of assemblage* as suggested by the conference's title, *Cities as Assemblages*. Within the conference we could indeed recognize different interpretations of the notion of assemblage in a dialectic confrontation between practice and theory. The assemblage of different analysis methods is probably the most coherent approach considering ISUF's interdisciplinary character (Whitehand, 2018). We should not ignore though those studies interpreting the city itself as an assemblage of different parts, cultures, and social groups, which is somehow the very essence of an urban environment. Another emerging interpretation is based on the assemblage of the analysis methods and the design process itself. This last assemblage is extremely relevant and perhaps should be considered as one of the most important aspects of ISUF's mission: changing in better the way our built environment is determined by embedding urban morphology studies in the design and planning practices.

After examining a selection of the papers, and how they relate to the *notion of assemblage*, we can now go back to the opening quote, and consider how the assembled parts may become a resulting unit, by building a critical parallel between the notion of *assemblage* and *collage artistic practice*. Colin Rowe stated that the "collage is a method deriving its virtue from its irony, because it seems to be a technique for using things and simultaneously disbelieving in them." (Koetter and Rowe, 1979). This disbelief is one of the possible evolutions of the assembled parts into a new unit. It could be argued that assemblage and collage are quite different techniques. The paper collage, which often is taken within the urban morphology and architecture research fields as an analogy of the assemblage technique, does not allow the deformation of the collated contents, these are restrained in their surface, and may be only cut into different forms and collated into new configurations. Using the assemblage practice instead it is possible to deform the assembled contents, and this deformation, or if you wish disbelief, is central for the attribution of meaning to the assembled parts. In the past the deformation technique has been widely used in the assemblage of architectural elements, both to adapt the chosen model to the site, but also to resignify the model by scaling, rotating, capsizing, breaking, and remounting its parts (Camiz, 2020). Moreover, the history of town planning is rich of examples of such a procedure, where the designers often used ancient models by deforming them, but not too much, in order to facilitate their recognition by the public. The Crescent, Regent Street and Circus at Bath designed in by John Wood the Elder in 1754 and completed in 1768 by John Wood the Younger, represents a meaningful example of such a compositional technique. Surprisingly all the urban spaces designed in Bath were inspired by models deriving from Constantinople: Constantine's forum for the Circus, the Sigma for the Crescent, and the Mese for Regent Street. The designer though, deformed and assembled them into a new configuration creating an urban part which transcends its architectural models. That same urban space became later a model for other projects such as "Les Espaces d'Abraxas" at Marne-la Vallée, Paris, designed by Ricardo Bofill Taller de Arquitectura (RBTA) in 1982. Even though the architect used here explicitly the theatre as an architectural model, it is clear that he referred the columned urban space of "Le colonnes de Saint-Christophe" (Cergy, France, 1986) to the Circus in Bath. Piranesi extensively used the deformation of the assembled elements in his *Pianta di Roma e del Campo Marzio*. Here he stretched the city limit to include the *Pons Milvius*, carved it and imposed it on a paper with the captions, added over it another scaled map partially rolled up, and overlapped architectural fragments and a rotated dedicatory inscription on top. In this etching the author extensively adopted the assemblage of different elements applying the deformation technique.

Deriving this deformation technique from the architectural composition domain, it is possible to introduce it into the research practice. Each research, even though obviously related to

previous models and analysis methods, should deform those components and assemble them into a new configuration, in order to avoid the replica of former studies, and rather become an improvement of those research methods, an improvement which can then be adopted as a model for future studies.

We hope that the studies in the field of Urban Morphology, will not just assemble existing techniques, such as the Conzenian, Muratorian, Space Syntax and quantitative Morphology, just to mention a few, but more and more will deform them in relation to the context, both for the understanding of the past and for the design of new meaningful urban spaces.

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