

# PROJECT

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## CRITIQUES

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Xefirotarch

Soriano y Asociados arquitectos

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Pier Vittorio Aureli

Jesse Reiser

Michael Meredith & Hilary Sample

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on Raimund Abraham

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Piranesi

POSITIONS



Andrew Atwood and Anna Neimark

## Zoopol, a monument to the animal kingdom

A dog has form. A table has form. A house has form. A city has no form. A city is constituted by its people, we say. It is built from the ground up, we agree. It is a complex collage of socioeconomic political forces, we all nod our heads. It has to remain familiar, predictable, and functional. We all excuse ourselves. The city is the real. If you fuck with it, everyone gasps. You are unethical, socially unacceptable, in well over your head. You put our economy at risk and our values at stake. You want form to participate in contemporary discourse? Great! Make an installation! Program a robot! Curate a symposium! Contribute to *Log!* Just be sure to put it in a secure place, removed from the world, like a gallery or a journal, for its own safety. And don't forget to archive it when the audience goes home and the funding dries up. If you are lucky, someone will refer to it on an academic review or footnote its not-so-critical content in defense of a post-critical dissertation.

Fuck that. We want to give the city form. We want to bring it into a critical relationship with its inhabitants. We want to make it alien and unfamiliar. This is a first attempt. And as a first, it is a basic exercise of procuring form using just one drawing: a figure/ground plan.

The figure/ground plan has been used to analyze existing cities. The Nolli map is possibly its most renowned realization, revealing the social structure of a city through a simple, diagrammatic image. Now we want to put the conventions of that famous black and white drawing to the test. Can it produce a new urban environment? Can it be used primarily as a generator of form and secondarily as a tool for analytical clarity? We decided that to produce an environment from scratch, the figure/ground drawing should be a representation of an estranged nature.

To reproduce nature's form is neither possible nor interesting. Humans express their delight in nature by creating quasi-natures—aesthetic perversions of natural phenomena. The greatest achievement in the production of quasi-natures is the animal print. The animal print is the aestheticized figure/ground of an animal that can be applied to anything. One can have a leopard-print dress, a zebra-print compact disc case, a giraffe-print tattoo. To fuel the human desire for mimicry, theft, and appropriation of nature, we sought out the most beautiful figure ground in the animal kingdom: *Panthera pardus*. Imagine an animal print city: Zoopol.

Zoopol is not a natural reserve. Zoopol does not solve environmental problems. Zoopol is not a self-sufficient ecosystem. Zoopol does not create harmony between species. Zoopol is not a tourist destination. Zoopol is an urban abstraction. It formalizes the distance between an object and its representation. The extrusion of the animal print figure/ground unifies an otherwise wildly complex set of parts into a monumental whole that represents urban form through a single architectural convention. If No-Stop City extends a single infrastructural system to infinity, Zoopol is its opposite. It does not solve problems. It creates new ones, unexpected ones: problems of taste, function, and representation. You can love New York, but how do you love Leopard? You can find your way through Los Angeles, but how do you navigate through Zebra? You can represent a suburban development, but how do you draw Giraffe? Zoopol creates difference and estrangement. It promotes blockages and difficulty. It provides a frame in which form can be brought to the scale of the city.

### I. City of Leopard

The City of Leopard is a dense tower settlement. The towers are uncomfortably close at the spine of the animal, and sparse on the white of its belly. Gradually, the pattern dissolves as the public space takes over. Each tower requires its own vertical circulation core. The typical thirty-foot structural grid is deformed to resolve at the undulating façade, producing an ad hoc reflected ceiling plan that cannot be defended by modernist ideals of function and form or postmodern ideas of skin and surface. The towers are neither ducks nor sheds. They are decorated ducks or, simply stated, extruded leopard spots.

### II. City of Zebra

The City of Zebra is a mid-rise slab development. No longer contained within isolated spots, interior space stretches across continuous, interlocking stripes. One could say that the streets are as wide as the buildings, or that the buildings are as thin as the streets. This vertical extrusion is much shorter than the leopard, yielding only nine floors, a standard Socialist slab type. To prevent some of the “hazards of nature” from causing damage, the buildings are sheared through with a new striping that runs against the grain of the zebra pattern. Each segmented zone is defined by its own entry that leads to a vertical circulation core.

### III. City of Giraffe

The City of Giraffe is a continuous low-density mat with courtyards throughout. It draws on Colin Rowe’s interpretation of Le Corbusier’s Unité d’Habitation as the positive figure of the void produced by the Uffizi courtyard in Florence. The inverted giraffe skin, figure turned to void, is extruded to eighteen feet only, producing a continuous mat perforated by immense public zones. Because of the network of building mass, every large-scale node on the grid forms a core at its center in order to interconnect the disparate segments vertically as well as horizontally. Some of the courtyards are private, completely enclosed by the building. Others overflow into one another for collective gathering.

Each urban typology constructs a different environment appropriate to its pattern. Living in a Zoopol, citizens develop intimate relationships with an animal through a modern version of a totem. The abstraction of nature returns as urban form. This relationship between the subject and city is a relationship of waste. But isn’t architecture everything that isn’t necessary?



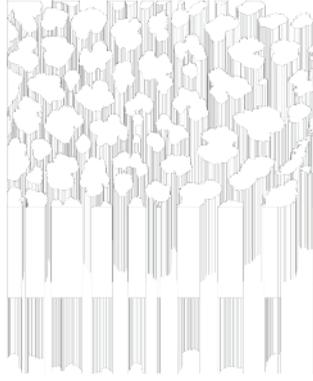
I.



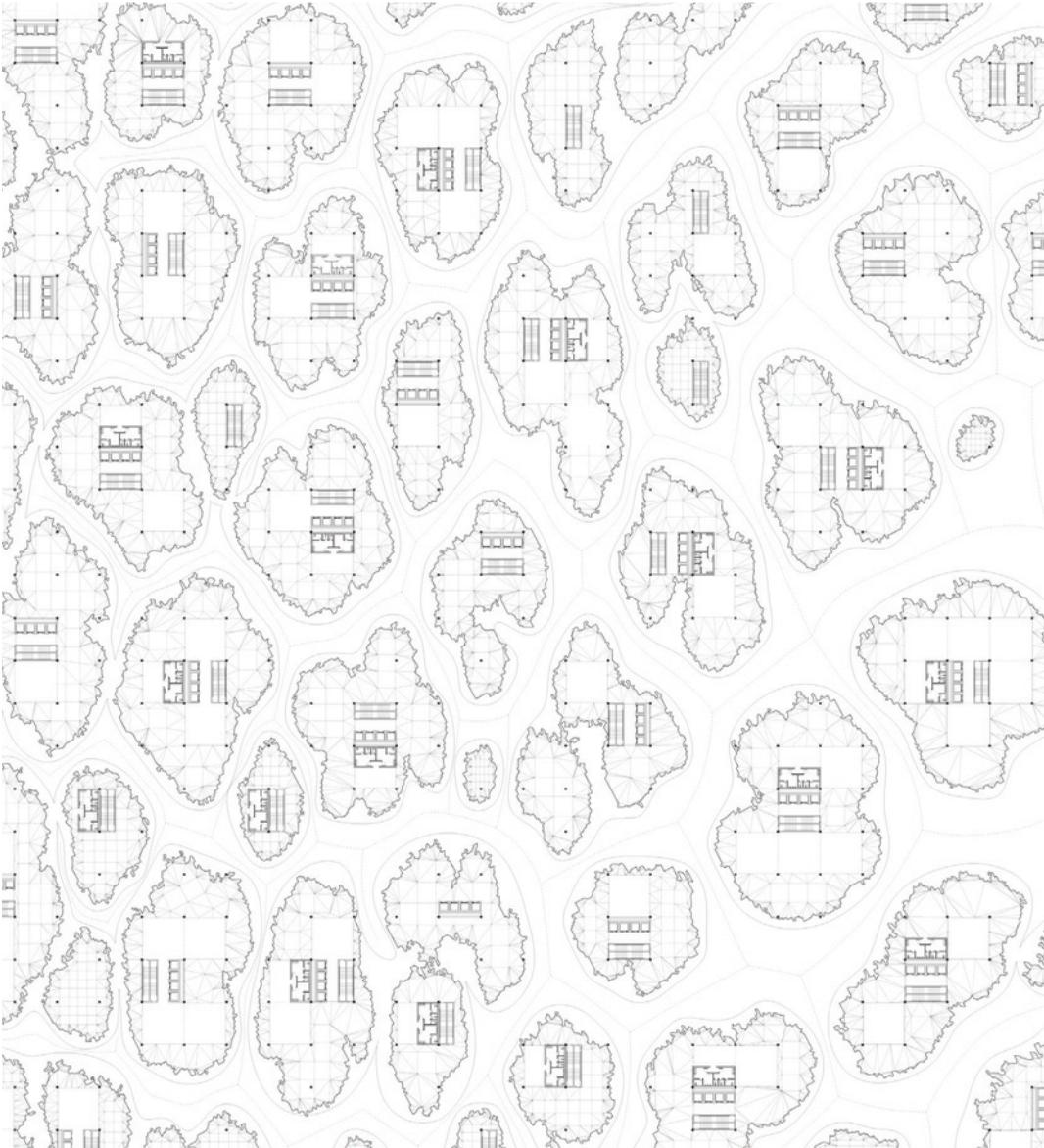
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III.

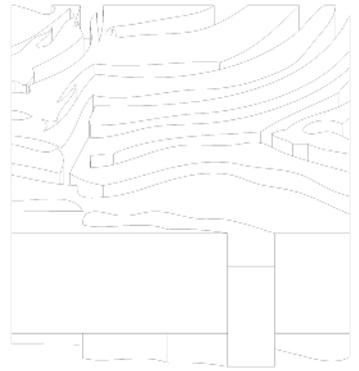


City of Leopard.  
Figure-Ground,  
Axonometric, and  
Plan. 2012.

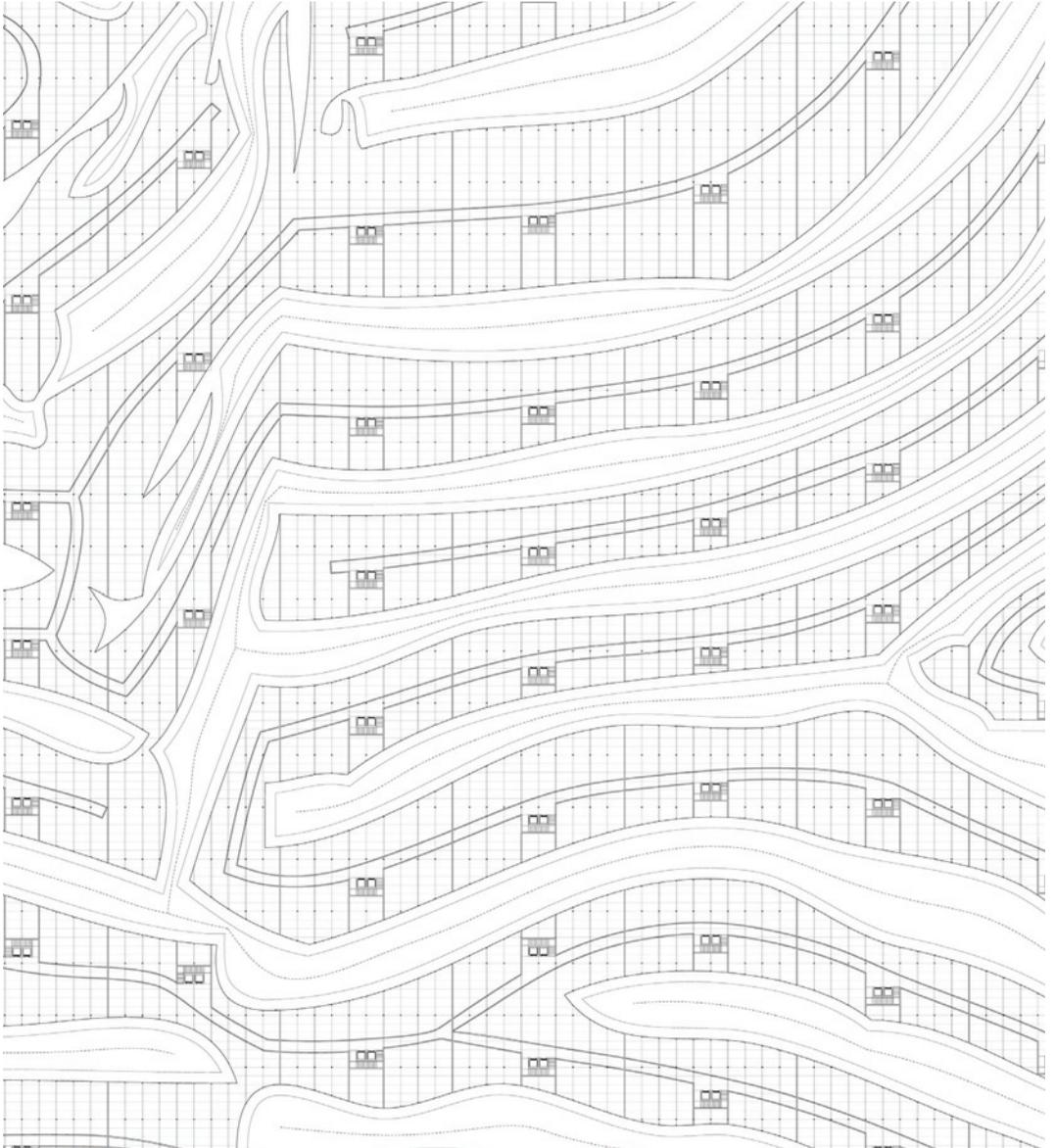


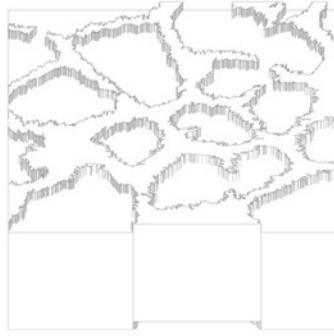
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**City of Zebra.**  
**Figure-Ground,**  
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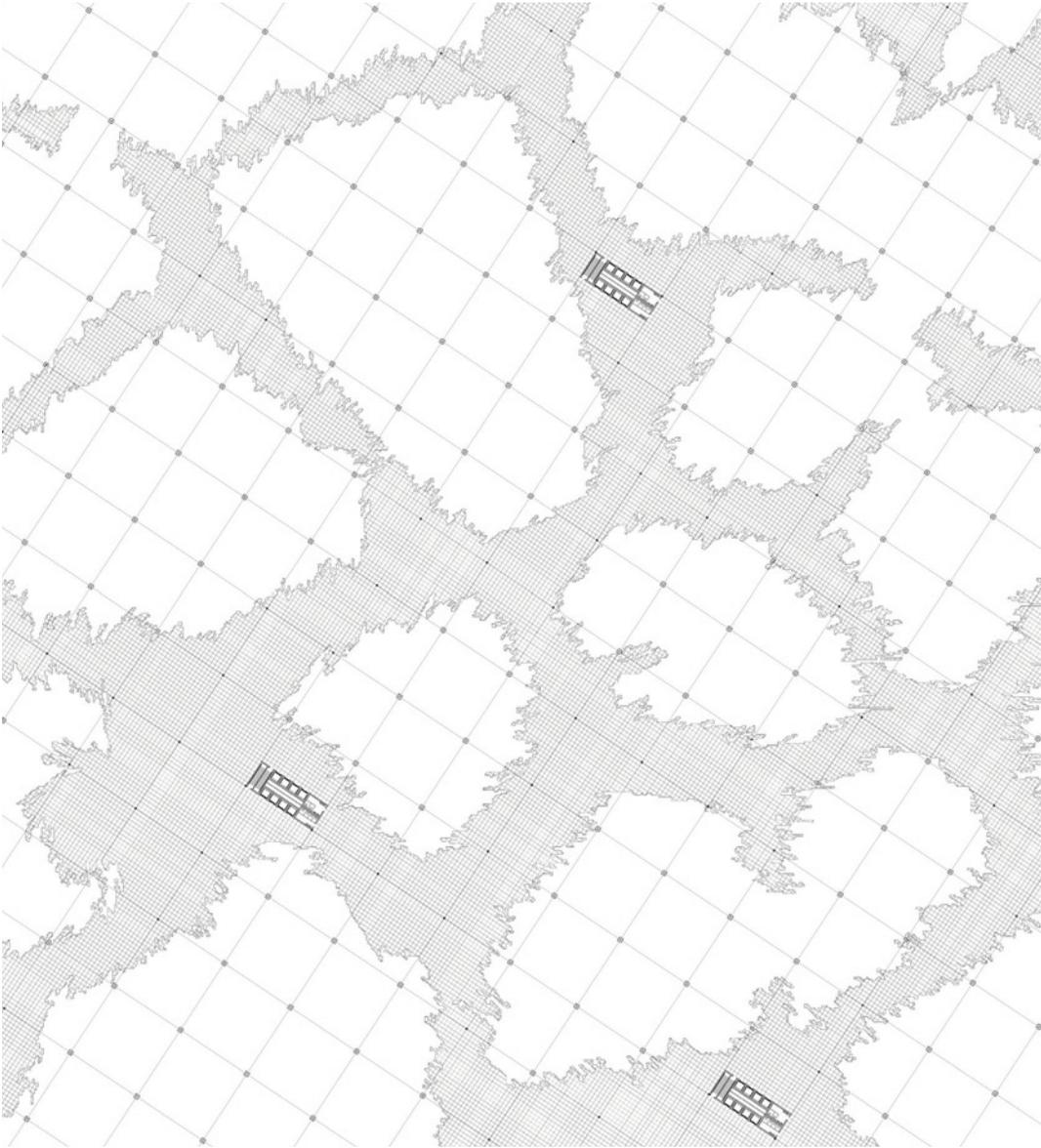


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