This book is intended to set out an architectural approach to the design of the city. This spatial approach is tested in the design of the Architecture Research Unit (ARU) Saemangeum Island City project in South Korea. ARU began working on the Saemangeum project in January 2008, as one of seven international architectural teams participating in an invited design competition / workshop. In our minds, city does not only exist at this large urban scale. We think it exists at many scales. In some ways, this book is a reassessment of the ideas of continuity and memory in architectural culture that Aldo Rossi wrote about more than 40 years ago: an invitation for further research about the city. ‘For I am convinced that progress concerning knowledge of the city can be real and efficacious only if we do not try to reduce the city to any one of its partial aspects, thereby losing sight of its broader significance. My outline for the establishment of an urban theory should be evaluated within this framework. It is the result of this long research and is intended to initiate a discourse on its own development and research rather than simply to act as a confirmation of results.’  

Over the past few years when the bizarre in architecture is beginning to show signs of exhaustion, we have tried to maintain our passion for Architecture as City. This idea carries the potential for generosity of architecture. We feel relaxed with this as a starting point for design. The experience of the city exists at many scales: as a city archaeology, a city origin or a city fragment. Even the smallest urbanism, such as the bottles and tea caddies.

on the table that form the horizon in a painting by the Italian painter, Giorgio Morandi are part of this concept of architecture as city. We sometimes also think of furniture as city. Our projects are rarely stand-alone objects. There are often at least two buildings in a project. We like the expression ‘architectural ensemble’ and we ask the question, ‘What can the ensemble of buildings do for the city?’ Can the ensemble be a gift to the city? Can it reveal special qualities of the city or the landscape? When one designs ensembles of buildings, one is designing the city in microcosm.

The spaces of the city in these ensemble projects are architectural and rich in spatial relationships. These relationships are about in-betweeness, generosity and an awareness of time. In this work, continuity of architectonic language is pursued by making contemporary translations of architectures of the past with a sense of unexpectedness and awkwardness.2 This is design as research.

The way Koreans think about space generally, and how Koreans use spaces in the city is different from the way we understand and use space in Europe. We have now worked in Korea for over ten years, and we have learned some wonderful things from the Koreans about space. For example, in Korea there is a Confucianist idea called ‘emptiness’. The Korean word for space, ‘Kong-gan’ directly translated into English is ‘emptiness’. This is a Far Eastern concept about nature that was taught by the 6th

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