PROJECT 1.
(SUB)URBAN ANALYSIS
Looking closely from a distance

Nolli Plan of Rome, 1748   *Milton Keynes landscpe infrastructure, MKDC, 1970s*

LEARNING FROM...

Learning from the existing landscape is a way of being revolutionary for an architect. Not the obvious way, which is to tear down Paris and begin again, as Le Corbusier suggested in the 1920s, but another, more tolerant way; that is, to question how we look at things.

The suburban city, Milton Keynes in particular - the example par excellence - challenges the architect to take a positive, non-chip-on-the-shoulder view. Architects are out of the habit of looking non-judgementally at the environment, because orthodox Modern architecture is progressive, if not revolutionary, utopian, and puristic; it is dissatisfied with existing conditions. Modern architecture has been anything but permissive. Architects have preferred to change the existing environment rather than enhance what is there.

But to gain insight from the commonplace is nothing new: Fine art often follows folk art. Romantic architects of the eighteenth century discovered an existing and conventional architecture. Early Modern architects apropriated an existing and conventional industrial vocabulary without much adaptation. Le Corbusier loved grain elevators and steamships; the Bauhaus looked like a factory; Mies refined the details of American steel factories for concrete buildings. Modern architects work through analogy, symbol and image - although they have gone to lengths to disclaim almost all determinants of their forms except structural necessity and the program - and they derive insights, analogies, and stimulation from unexpected images. There is a perversity in the learning process: We look backward at history and tradition to go forward; we can also look downward to go upward. And withholding judgement may be used as a tool to make later judgement more sensitive. This is a way of learning from everything.

Courtesy of 'Learning from Las Vegas' by Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown and Steven Izenour, 1972

AIMS
To obtain plan information and learn to manipulate it to gain an understanding of the existing form of a Milton Keynes' neighbourhood.
To gain control of 2D Vectorworks and Adobe Illustrator to produce beautiful, insightful drawings.
To research historical information about a neighbourhood from a variety of sources and represent it graphically.
To appreciate what can and cannot be understood when studied from afar.
To prepare a strategy for approaching the first site visit to MK.
To begin to consider how study of an archetype can be used to generate a general approach.

BRIEF
GRID SQUARE NEIGHBOURHOOD
Milton Keynes is a grid city. Each grid square defines a different neighbourhood. You are to become an expert on one grid square. No-one will have ever known more about that neighbourhood than you. Its form, its residents, its character, its past, present and future uses.
The grid squares will be randomly allocated on the first day of the studio.

AN ASTONISHING PLAN
"Giambattista Nolli (1701-1756) was an architect and surveyor who lived in Rome and devoted his life to documenting the architectural and urban foundations of the city. The fruit of his labor, La Pianta Grande di Roma ("the great plan of Rome") is one of the most revealing and artistically designed urban plans of all time. The Nolli map is an ichnographic plan map of the city, as opposed to a bird's eye perspective, which was the dominant cartographic representation style prevalent before his work. Not only was Nolli one of the first people to construct an ichnographic map of Rome, his unique perspective has been copied ever since.
The map depicts the city in astonishing detail. Nolli accomplished this by using scientific surveying techniques, careful base drawings, and minutely prepared engravings. The map's graphic representations include a precise architectural scale, as well as a prominent compass rose, which notes both magnetic and astronomical north. The Nolli map is the first accurate map of Rome since antiquity and captures the city at the height of its cultural and artistic achievements."
The Nolli Website, http://nolli.uoregon.edu/preface.html
(Note: the site includes an incredibly detailed interactive map of the Nolli plan)

Construct a map that depicts your neighbourhood in astonishing detail. It should be produced digitally and read well at a scale of 1:1250. It will be used as the basis for all your future drawings. It will include the grid roads bordering your neighbourhood and everyting that lies within.

You shall use the available resources, including:
- Edina Digimap OS information - the base Ordnance Survey information
- Aerial photography - Plan (maps.google.co.uk)
 - Birdsview (maps.live.com)
- Local maps
- Books on the neighbourhood

QUESTIONS
1. What does the basic OS information reveal about the form of your neighbourhood?
2. How much can a figure ground drawing, without the benefits of a site visit, describe?
3. Nolli's figure-ground drawing illustrates the 'public' areas of the city. It is interesting that these include not only the open spaces but churches and interior courts. Which 'public' spaces are included in your neighbourhood plan? Is the black/white, public/private dichotomy a useful device for your neighbourhood or are more subtle gradations required e.g. accessible to all, accessible to members, accessible to owners, acceessible to all but accessed by none
4. Nolli's plan takes the masonry construction of Rome as its defining edges. Milton Keynes has very little masonry. What defines the edges of the spaces? Explore a number of different edges in your plan, which may include buildings, paths (vehicular and pedestrian), landscape, communication networks, etc
5. How does the information from aerial photographs contribute to your plan?
6. Milton Keynes is 40 years old. How might early maps/photographs influence your map.
7. What appears to be the centre of your neighbourhood?

CREATION MYTHS

Everywhere has a story of how it was created, based upon memory, evidence, truth and falsity. The story of your neighbourhood must be researched in parallel with your plan investigations. The wider your investigations, the richer the story. Sources at this stage may include:

•	books	- LMU library
		- RIBA library
		- books.google.com
		- abebooks.co.uk
		- amazon.co.uk
•	documentaries, film, adverts	- Youtube
		- BFI National Library, www.bfi.org.uk/filmtvinfo/library/
		- Open University, www.open2.net
		- TV and web TV
•	music	- lyrics, many available online
		- peer-2-peer programs e.g. Limewire
•	radio	- BBC listen again e.g. the Reunion special on MK, 2007
•	web	- MKweb
		- Milton Keynes Council, www.milton-keynes.gov.uk

The internet is a vast resource but finding quality has never been harder. We will not accept lazy googling.

Start a journal on your neighbourhood that records everything you find out about it and everything that you consider relevant to its story. The journal should be approx. A4 in size and be easily expandable. This may be on paper or an online blog (wordpress.org, blogspot.com)
For third years it is the starting point of the year's journal, for second years an essential collection.

REQUIREMENTS
1.   1:1250 figure ground plan of your neighbourhood, 'an astonishing plan', printed with true north at the top of the page
2.   1:2500 or similar, plans of your neighbourhood analysing its form (3 minimum, 12 preferred)
3.   1:2500 aerial photograph of neighbourhood
4.   Neighbourhood journal - approx. A4, minimum 30 pages
5.   Verbal description of your own formal interests in the neighbourhood

TIMETABLE

1	T 30/09	10am - studio introduction 2pm - brief introduction	GS VL
	F 03/10	10am - Suburban analysis SEMINAR	VL
2	T 07/10	10am - MK history SEMINAR 2pm - Figure Ground Plan PIN-UP in pairs	GS GS VL
	F 10/10	10am - Suburban development SEMINAR	VL
3	T 14/10	All day, 10am start : CRITS. 5pm, Project 2 briefing	GS VL GS
	F 17/10	10am - Site visit briefing	VL
4	T 21/10	10am - visit MK neighbourhood	AOC+

INITIAL REFERENCES
VENTURI, SCOTT-BROWN AND IZENOUR, Learning From Las Vegas, Cambridge MA, MIT Press, 1972
RATTENBURY & HARDINGHAM, Supercrit #2. Robert Venturi & Denise Scott Brown, Learning from Las Vegas, Oxon, Routledge, 2007
WALKER, The Architecture and Planning of Milton Keynes, London, Architectural Press, 1982
CLAPSON, A social history of Milton Keynes, London, Frank Cass, 2004
The Nolli Website, http://nolli.uoregon.edu/preface.html