

ARCH5131C TOPICAL STUDIES IN DESIGN THEORY  
**MODELS OF INHABITATION: 3 Episodes**  
2016-17, 1<sup>st</sup> Term

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## 1.0\_DESCRIPTION



Tai O, Hong Kong. Photo: Peter W. Ferretto

## 1.1\_Theory

*The kind of society that, retrospectively, came to be called modern, emerged out of the discovery that human order is vulnerable, contingent and devoid of reliable foundations. That discovery was shocking. The response to the shock was a dream and an effort to make order solid, obligatory and founded"*

Zygmunt Bauman: "Imitations of Postmodernity" quoted in "Architecture Depends" by Jeremy Till.

The Background City, the city we inhabit but are unable to acknowledge, the city we live in yet fail observe, is collectively dismissed and marginalized by architects who in their unyielding attempt to improve our habitat via new "designs", seem to have lost the ability to appreciate the banal and quotidian urban presence. There are seldom any

architects who claim authorship of the Background City, shame and indignation prevail. By definition the urban “background” is an orphan and circumstantial soul that at best can be described as a default urban by product only acknowledged via its antonym, the foreground city.

Contrary to the foreground city, the city that is constantly projected at us with enticing adjectives such as iconic, dynamic and multi-dimensional that never cease in its pursuit of a unique identity, the Background City is preoccupied with coexisting, adapting and avoiding all manifestations of its ego, in short being invisible. The present reality of cities, for better or worse, the “here and now” of our urban existence is shaped by that 99% we arrogantly refuse to discuss, and rather than dismiss such pervasive urban agglomeration this paper seeks to observe and interrogate the mechanisms and traces of this non-city.

The insignificant is paramount when it comes to appreciating the presence of the Background City, a condition rather than a physical place that has little relevant history and where the actual is all that counts. Just as one can never recall the sound of background noise, the background city cannot be reproduced, only recognized. Yet within this infinite sea of homogeneous scenarios, behind the scenes, back-stage lie infinite moments of inhabitation, existences that can only be brought into focus manually, in a manner similar to tuning into a wireless radio, one has to tune in to the right city wavelength to be able to absorb and appreciate its intimate world of micro inhabitation, its invisible latent energy that makes every background scene distinct. We are no longer following a flat and generic urban landscape but have entered a parallel actual world with real urban depth.

Hong Kong embodies the notion of Background City par-excellence, a manufactured metropolis that came into existence accidentally, and is today a largely engineered territory; a city that co-exists with nature in the process generating an artificial state of reclaimed land, underground networks, bridges, retaining walls and other infrastructure elements. Based on the conceptual urban theory of the Italian anthropologist Franco La Cecla “Against City Planning” (2015) we will forensically analyze three Hong Kong conditions, articulating how the Background City operates logistically and most importantly without the aid of architects and urban planners to prove that cities are still fundamentally connected to human existence. Rather than anticipate the future architects should re-engage with the invisible networks of the present and in the process reconnect with its inhabitants.

## **1.2\_Methodology**

Over the course of this semester, 13 weeks, we will analyse “Inhabited Urban Conditions” in four specific areas of Hong Kong. Following on from previous elective classes (2015-2016: entitled “CONDITION/HONG KONG”) where more than 300 instances of urban inhabitation were documented, this class will focus on three areas to develop a more detailed and specific mapping.

### **Areas**

- Mong Kok (Sham Shui Po)
- Tin Shui Wan (Lau Fau Shan)
- Central (Sheung Wan)

### **Team**

- The class will be organized in teams, 3 students/team, 5 teams in total.
- The schedule is broken down into 3 series (3 weeks per series)

### **Series**

- Each Series consisting of three classes: Site, Workshop and Presentation

- Site visits are mandatory and will be conducted collectively
- Workshops are sessions where each team presents and tables work in progress
- During the discussion session 3 theoretical texts will be introduced
- Presentation is the moment the specific condition is consolidated

### **Final Submission**

- The final submission will be a scale model and associated photograph of one specific condition the team selects to blow-up
- The idea behind the photograph is that it will capture the digested thinking on how we interpret the act of inhabitation
- We will look closely at the work of the German artist Thomas Demand
- All models will be made from the same material, cardboard.

### **Seoul Biennale**

- The work will be exhibited at the Seoul Architecture and Urbanism Biennale, Cities exhibition and represent Hong Kong.
- This is an international event with a large exposure.
- The exhibition will consist of: Photographs, Models and Research

## **2.0\_OBJECTIVES**

The objectives of Arch 5131 "MODELS OF INHABITATION: 3 Episodes" Elective are to develop a critical awareness about the relationship between Theory/City and translate this awareness into analytical research project, through:

### **Hong Kong**

- Take students outside of the classroom and remove preconceived ideas about the city they live in.
- Walking and observation as a process to read our urban context
- Critical thinking skills to translate observations into ideas

### **Mapping**

- Develop an analytical and intuitive awareness and understanding regarding the relationship between City and Architecture.
- By carefully observing of the status quo students will map the territory through: black and white photography, sketching and axonometric 3D line drawings developed using digital software.
- Understand the importance of editing vis-à-vis research, how through a process of digestion ideas can be honed and clarified.

### **Model Making**

- In an age when all architectural representation is dominated by ubiquitous computer renderings, we will develop analogue models
- These models will all be made using the same material, cardboard, and will seek to express the DNA of the condition
- In order to make these models several steps will be required: measured survey of the site, digital model to understand the complexity.

### **Photography**

- Five most critical examples, one by each team, will be selected to become the detailed condition
- This condition will be chosen via an open group discussion
- Photography techniques: foreground/background, depth of field, perspective and viewing angle will all be elaborated.

### **Theoretical Texts**

- The introduction to 3 significant theoretical texts, where students will be taught how to read tactically and critically relating the theories back to the urban observations.
- Terrain Vague by Sola Morales
- Typologies by Rafael Moneo
- Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias by Michel Foucault

### **3.0\_LEARNING OUTCOME**

By the end of this one semester course, it is intended that students develop the following skills and capacities:

- Ability to undertake focused and analytical study into a new research topic.
- Ability to adapt and react to urban sites and understand the cultural and sociological implications of their city.
- Ability to formulate a critical position regarding the relationship between City and Architecture.
- Ability to perform a concise site analysis of specific micro conditions, considering both architectural aspects such as scale and urban fabric as well as social considerations.
- Develop a set of representation tools to characterize the spatial and material quality of their conditions, including: 3D line drawings and image editing.
- Ability to fabricate detailed scale models
- Ability to use photography as a design tool to articulate their research.

### **4.0\_ASSESSMENT SCHEME**

The class instructor will monitor and evaluate each student's progress and performance over the course of the semester. At the end of the semester the instructor will review each student's final performance and the evaluation and grading of the class will be structured as follows:

#### **Final Presentation: 70%**

- Each student will be asked to study 3 episodes
- 1 episode will become the center piece and will constitute 50% of the grade evaluation

#### **Process: 30%**

- Students should attend all classes, any absence should be warned and accompanied by a medical note if recurring.
- Students are asked to participate in discussions and engage in developing different view on the subject.

### **5.0\_COURSE FORMAT**

The course will be structured into 4 sessions (13 lectures) as follows:

#### **Session 1\_Mong Kok**

1\_16.01.17\_Site Visit to Mong Kok and Sham Shui Po

2\_23.01.17\_Workshop – student to present the condition they analysed

30.01.17\_Chinese New Year

3\_07.02.17\_Presentation

#### **Session 2\_Tin Shui Wan**

14.02.17\_Class postponed

4\_21.02.17\_Site Visit to Tin Shui Wan and Lau Fau Shan

5\_28.02.17\_ Workshop – student to present the condition they analysed  
6\_07.03.17\_ Presentation Tin Shui Wan

### **Session 3\_Central**

7\_14.03.17\_ Site Visit to Central and Sheung Wan  
8\_21.03.17\_ Workshop – student to present the condition they analysed  
9\_28.03.17\_ Presentation Central

### **Session 4\_Final Episode Selection**

10\_04.04.17\_ Presentation of Chosen site and model ideas  
11\_11.04.17\_ Model draft, size and narrative  
18.04.17\_ U6 Finals, Class suspended  
25.04.17\_ M1 Finals, Class suspended  
12\_02.05.17\_ Model completion and Photography preparation  
13\_09.05.17\_ Final Presentation

## **6.0\_REQUIRED READINGS**

Three critical texts will be issued in PDF format at the beginning of the semester, all students are expected to read these before the lecture.

- Foucault, M. "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias" (In October – Cambridge, MA, MIT-press, 1984)
- Moneo, Rafael. "On Typology." (Oppositions, no. 13 (1978): 22-45.)
- Sola-Morales, I. "Terrain Vague" (AnyPlace, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995)

## **7.0\_FURTHER READINGS**

Students are encouraged to investigate the following works:

- Banham, R. "Los Angeles: the Architecture of the Four Ecologies" (Oakland: University of California Press, 1971/2009)
- Borio, G.; Wüthrich C. "Hong Kong in-Between" (Berlin: Park Books, 2015)
- Christ, E. & Gantenbein, C. "Hong Kong Typology". (Zurich: Gta Verlag, 2010)
- Crawford, M.; Chase, J.; Kaliski, J. "Everyday Urbanism". (New York: Monacelli Press, 1999)
- Cupers, K and Miessen, M. "Spaces of Uncertainty" (Wuppertal: Verlag Muller and Busmann, 2002)
- De Certeau, M. "Practices of Space". (In "On Signs" Ed. Blonsky - Batimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985)
- De Certeau, M. "The Practice of Everyday Life". (Berkeley: UC Press. 2006)
- Diener, R; Herzog, J; Meili, M; de Meuron, P; Herz, M; Schmid, C; Topalovic, M. "The Inevitable Specificity of Cities" (Zurich: Lars Müllers Publishers, 2015)
- Evans, R. "Translation from Drawing to Building". (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997)
- Ferretto, P. "Place/Seoul" (Seoul: Propaganda, 2015)
- Foucault, M. "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias" (In October – Cambridge, MA, MIT-press, 1984)
- Harvey, D. "Rebel Cities". (London, New York: Verso, 2011)
- Kim, S. "The FAR Game – Constraints Sparking Creativity – Korean Pavilion Catalogue to the 15<sup>th</sup> Venice Architectural Biennale". (Seoul: Space, 2016)
- Pai, H.; Cho, M. "Crow's Eye View: The Korean Peninsula - Korean Pavilion Catalogue to the 14<sup>th</sup> Venice Architectural Biennale". (Seoul: Archilife, 2014)
- Rattenbury, K; Hardingham, S. "Cedric Price; Non Plan. Cedric Price. Cedric Price: Potteries Thinkbelt". (London: Routledge, 2007)
- Rossi, R. "The Architecture of the City". (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1984)

- Sassen, S. "Making Public Interventions in Today's Massive Cities" (Paper at the "Generalized Empowerment" Urban Forum Conference, Brussels 2006)
- Sola-Morales, I. "Terrain Vague" (AnyPlace, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995)
- Venturi, R. "Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture". (New York: MOMA, Architectural Press, 1966).

## **8.0\_FIELD TRIP**

Please refer to section 5.0 Course Format

## **9.0\_SCHEDULE**

Please refer to section 5.0 Course Format

### **IMPORTANT NOTE TO STUDENTS:**

#### **Attendance:**

Class attendance is required in all courses. For an excused absence, the instructor must be notified and presented with documentation of illness or personal matter. Please note: Three (3) or more unexcused absences may result in a failing grade for the course.

#### **Academic Honesty:**

Attention is drawn to University policy and regulations on honesty in academic work, and to the disciplinary guidelines and procedures applicable to breaches of such policy and regulations. Details may be found at: <http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/policy/academichonesty/>. With each assignment, students may be required to submit a statement that they are aware of these policies, regulations, guidelines and procedures.