The University of Hong Kong
Department of Architecture
Landscape City Architecture
The platforms are a non-hierarchical approach toward structuring a new type of architectural education, in which students and teachers alike can focus on a particular interest / research enquiry and yet connect to all other expertise, essential to understanding the discipline of architecture today. The design studios will be embedded in the platforms and encourage students and faculty to look at the topics of research and learning through specific lenses. The platforms will also create the spine of all other courses the core courses and the electives will gradually be transformed into courses reinforcing the platforms research direction as lines of expertise.

5 Platforms
MTR – Material Technology Robotics
ESR – Ecologies Sustainability Regeneration
LCR – Living City Rural
GLI – Geographies Landscapes Infrastructures
PAM – Politics Art Media

The platforms are therefore a robust structure that are inclusive, they allow for the teaching faculty to plug into their line of research and their respective labs or simply where the line of expertise can grow into specific enquiries inspiring and inducing the teaching agenda.

They are forums for development and knowledge transfer; they combine the scientific (rigorous) and artistic (the intuitive) issues. Platforms may act separately and independently of one another. They may overlap and comment one another. They will be the thrust of our new architecture curriculum. These Platforms are places of a collective teaching form, they allow for urgent issues/topics to be discussed, debated and described. They are what Hannah Arendt called the commons, in her masterpiece The Human Condition.

We welcome all of those who are interested in actively writing this promising beautiful new story of architecture with all of us here at the University of Hong Kong.

Nasrine Seraji – AA Dipl RIBA
Professor and head of department
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This course offers an introduction to architecture and the built environment for first-year students. Architecture is a space charged with meaning, and this meaning is generated by our own experience of place and space. The current cultural representation of architectural images often leads us to perceive architecture as something that only functions at the immediacy of object, sensation, and rhetoric, and fails to transmit the reality of the experience.

In this course we take a step back to examine fundamental issues that deal with the experiential relationship of space and place, which we encounter everyday in the city. The course identifies different sets of architectural conditions, including building type (composite building), micro-scale urban adaptation (alleyways), and formal/informal appropriation. Students develop an understanding of how ideas that define our own space are closely linked with social and cultural identities.

In addition, the class expands its reading about other countries, with the aim of learning how different cultures adopt and develop a range of architectural attitudes towards their relations of space and place.

The tutorial consists of exercises that utilize Hong Kong as a shared resource. Each project is shared within the class as a learning tool, building up fluency in basic analytical skills that become an integral part of the student's future learning development.
This course serves as an introduction to architectural design and the design studio. Core skills are complemented by a fundamental understanding of the design process. The theme for this first studio is the village, broadly understood as a collective organization of people and buildings. In this regard, there is a close parallel between the topic and structure of the design studio. As each student designs an individual house, collectively the studio designs a village. This collective learning process mirrors the collective artefact.

How do we define a village? Especially within a contemporary context which is increasingly fixated upon the city. The city abounds with definition; the medieval city, the tabula-rasa city, the industrial city, the shrinking city, the mega city, just to list a few. The village, on the other hand, has a relatively stable anchor in our historical consciousness. It is rooted in tradition, agriculture and timelessness. But if we take a closer look at what could be called a village today, very few can be understood in this classical sense. The most ‘traditional’ examples have become tourist attractions, subsumed by the city as a pastiche of rural life, and an artefact of the past. The village as an idea, remains open for new definition. Its potential is still situated in opposition to the city, rather than in any particular quality or attribute, which leaves fertile ground for new exploration.

Like any architecture studio, the village is first and foremost a community of people, and this is the basis for our study—a common site. Each student develops an individual project in relationship with the collective transformation of the village. This highlights the question of a common dialogue, and a shared architectural language in the process. Meeting periodically as a group, rules and relationships must be established, and as in vernacular villages, a limited access to materials and techniques frames the ground for a common language.
In his Futurist manifesto, “The Art of Noises,” Luigi Russolo flaunted his anti-qualifications with pride saying: ‘I am not a musician by profession, and therefore I have no acoustical prejudices, nor any works to defend. I am a futurist painter who projects beyond himself, into an art much-loved and studied, his desire to renew everything. Thus, bolder than a professional musician, unconcerned by my apparent incompetence, and convinced that my audacity opens up all rights and all possibilities, I am able to divine the great renewal of music by means of the Art of Noises.’

In “Thinking Architecture,” Peter Zumthor writes, ‘John Cage said in one of his lectures that he is not a composer who hears music in his mind and then attempts to write it down. He has another way of operating. He works out concepts and structures and then has them performed to find out how they sound’

Sound may be invisible, but it can be understood as an architectural material like wood, glass, concrete or light – shaped and enclosed by design. Bringing together research, collaboration and pedagogy, this studio course interrogates the relationship between sound and space through a dialogue between two distinct disciplines: architecture and music.

With recent attention from both architects and musicians towards challenging longstanding techno-acoustic understandings of sound space, the course has expanded through existing discussions and collaborative explorations between musicians and architects, students, practitioners and researchers.

Architectural Design 1
Sounding Architecture

Teachers
Thomas Tsang (Coordinator),
Sony Devabhaktuni, Miho Hirabayashi,
Jae Lim, Ryo Fujimori, Wei Tseng

Collaborators
Deborah Waugh, José Vicente Neglia
(HKU Department of Music), William
Lane, Tim Chan, Hong Kong New Music
Ensemble (HKNME), Donn Holohan
(Fabrication Laboratory Manager, HKU
Faculty of Architecture), Ken Ueno
(UC Berkeley Department of Music),
Eli Marshall (Cornell University
Department of Music)
“If you have a credo to create a world where we want to live, we have to create this world.”

“...and this is the most precious thing in music; music is not a reproduction, but it’s a mission, it is an exploration of the inner world of ourselves and everyone who comes to attend the performance.” - Teodor Currentzis

The aim of this studio is to liberate and challenge the neglected part of our sensibilities, intuition, and intelligence to their full capacity, creating a range of architectural readings/makings based on debate and dialogue. Instead of resorting to quick decision-making and fast production, the studio nurtures and develops a collective identity by creating a singular culture of anticipation and action. The finality of this endeavour is open and yet unknown. We will embrace and explore it.

Where? Perm, Russia: cold, remote and desolate (The Easternmost city of Europe)

Whom? Teodor Currentzis: a Greek-Russian conductor and his musicians – committed, ascetic, uncompromising

What? Design a musical commune to live and work for the sole purpose of musical production – communal, anarchic, intense

The studio designs five different types of autonomous spaces that are shared by all members of the commune. Short independent exercises are set for the students, each of these make up a design phase and must be completed within two weeks. These investigations contain aspects of both research and architectural composition. In this case, the definition of ‘space’ is fairly open, and each tutor strategizes the exact level of attainable precision and resolution beforehand. The result should not be perceived as an enclosed space with an exterior finish or a purely superficial form of interior design. On the contrary, it is a reduced condition of architecture that enables the prescribed action to take its form (bathing, dining, resting, contemplating or composing). Each student is encouraged to develop his or her own view of space/action relation, based on readings of a wide range of cultural resources including painting, film, literature, architecture, and autobiography.
Hong Kong and Shanghai both have differing social, political, climatic and spatial characteristics. This course examines how local specifics shape architecture. By investigating civic architecture, the studio asks what the drivers of civic space making are. Looking at context, structure, programme, circulation, climate and density, it then goes on to consider how the design of a civic building expresses itself in an architecturally different way in both these cities.

Three studios in Hong Kong and three in Shanghai define their interpretations of civic architecture. Each studio has the autonomy to define its research and design questions and the related methodology. As a result, the course generates a diversified discourse on architecture and the city: engaging in a dialogue of the different functions of a civic building. What are local architectural types that define the identity of the city? What makes a civic building civic? What is its use for the city? What is its typological form? And furthermore, what are the specifics of a civic building per se, and the civic in Hong Kong and in Shanghai?

Students develop a speculative proposal based on their observations of existing municipal buildings in each of the cities. They develop a critical understanding of the issues and parameters that drive the typologies of their current model and propose alternative or critical models to engage in new ways with the city. Students are given a site, a programmatic brief, and site-specific parameters to start their investigation of civic buildings in Hong Kong and Shanghai.
This course investigates infrastructural civic building types: how they engage with the city; how they benefit the neighbourhood; their typological forms; and additionally, what the differences are of this type in Hong Kong and Shanghai. Each studio investigates a different approach to the question of the infrastructural civic building and defines specific positions as a design methodology.

In the modernist city, the functions of the metropolis are strictly segregated. Yet the high-density, post-modernist city challenges the separation of functions and has evolved into a hybridized aggregation that currently causes most of the urban problems faced in Hong Kong and Shanghai: all types of pollution; the infrastructural dissection of the city; a compartmentalization of urban spaces; and a class of functions. The course engages in a critical discourse about the issues associated with pollution, waste, water and infrastructure, and explores how design can help overcome the negative spatial effects associated with infrastructural projects in the high-density city. Each studio defines its own subject and creates its own brief.

The design project is an infrastructural project for a specific parameter. Students are expected to develop a speculative proposal based on the observation of the existing infrastructural service buildings in each city; to develop a critical understanding of the issues and parameters that have driven the typologies to their current model; and to propose an alternative/critical model to engage in new ways with the city. Students are given a site, a programmatic brief, and an environmental recourse to start their investigation of what an infrastructural services building can be in Hong Kong/Shanghai.
Micro-housing has become popular around the world in recent years. A major draw of micro-housing is its inner-city location. With compact building sizes and site coverage, and affordable rent, this type of housing is often targeted at singles and young people. For those on a limited budget, the proximity to the city centre makes the sacrifice of less housing space worthwhile.

This studio takes a closer look at communal micro-housing design looking in particular at three key questions:

1. How micro can it be? - The majority of people in Hong Kong live in compact apartments. What is the smallest acceptable dimension for a private unit for a young single person in Hong Kong?

2. How communal can it be? - If the rentable private space is pushed to the minimum, what kind of functions and spaces can be shared as communal spaces outside of the private unit?

3. How can efficiency be re-defined? - The circulation space in housing developments is often minimized, when in fact circulation space constitutes an essential part of our residential living experience. Can we rethink the use of circulation space and synthesize it with other functions in order to form an ‘efficient’ component?

This studio explores communal micro-housing under this rubric, with a bottom-up approach. Students analyse precedents based primarily on 4 fundamental architectural elements: circulation, unit, structure and threshold; and explore the possibility of transforming these design strategies into the scale of micro-housing units by integrating various unit types with circulation and communal spaces. Finally, students synthesize these ideas into an overall mid-rise slab block, as communal micro-housing.
Is collective housing just a collection of homes? What are the common elements connecting collective housing and an individual home? Is there common ground for considered, good collective housing and a considered, good home?

This studio sets out to respond to these questions by re-appropriating collective housing as an urban common. An urban common is envisioned to embrace the ‘in-betweeness’ of the following relationships: commonality and diversity; human scale and urban scale; personal interest and public value; family and community; co-living and co-sharing; live-ability and sustainability; nature and culture; and common sense and the common good.

The underlying discourse is to reveal and reinvent collective housing by investigating its common architectural parts and details. An ‘elemental approach’ is therefore formulated as the point of departure during the course of research investigation and design inquiry. The six common elements of collective housing are identified as: structure, enclosure, opening, circulation, fixture, and environmental systems. The studio exercises emphasise the synthesis of design-by-research work (precedent analysis and reframing of design problems) with research-by-design work (prototype design and adaptive design application).
The contemporary city is in a state of crisis: identity loss, perilous levels of density, social exclusion, and age segregation are just a few of the ‘diseases’ afflicting the urban collective. This studio proposes a ‘diagnosis’ based on inventing a new housing paradigm of sustainable living for urban and social regeneration, by embracing diversity, human comfort and responsibilities as prerogatives.

Ideas of living are translated through various levels of resolution to represent our perceptions of what we need to live affordably, sustainably, responsibly and in some cases, to survive. Physical and conceptual elements relevant to housing are selected to inform a study of basic architectural components and their conceptual parameters. From this learning the studio then asks students to design a housing complex that looks at these housing components and their programmatic relationship of live/work to create new opportunities for healthy co-existences in the city.

The theme of the studio’s work is entrepreneurship (for example, youth entrepreneurship as initiated by Seoul’s government campaigns of ‘Youth Business 1000’, ‘Youth Entrepreneur Start-up Academy’ and multiculturalism that has come about with the increase in ethnic diversity in recent years. How these concepts mould or disengage with components of living forms the foundation of the comprehensive building design scheme of this studio – a live/work housing complex in Seoul, Korea.
Due to the competing pressures of land scarcity and population growth, Hong Kong's high-rise residential buildings are growing taller and more compact, leading them to become increasingly dependent on mechanical systems to achieve thermal comfort. This urban phenomenon has altered the city's traditionally moderate climate to produce a complex array of vertical microclimates squeezed between buildings. Heat and humidity are intensified by the city's anthropogenic activities, building norms, and dense urban morphology, and are stratified in section from the street level to the rooftops. By obstructing existing environmental flows, buildings disrupt the energy balance of their surroundings by interfering with air movement, levels of exposure, and the process by which solar radiation is reflected, transmitted, and absorbed (Yannas, 2013).

The Climate-Responsive Housing Studio seeks to minimize the need for mechanical heating and cooling systems by responding to the daily, seasonal, and sectional variations found in vertical microclimates. It also seeks to design elements of building enclosures with variable properties and adjustable components, to achieve adaptive thermal comfort. Defining the conditions for a symbiotic relationship between high-rise buildings and the vertical climatology of their surroundings, are the primary concern of this studio. Knowledge, an understanding of the physical principles underlying this relationship, and the computational tools to translate these into architectural prototypes for climate-responsive housing forms the studio’s core design research agenda.
In the context of highly segregated zoning for housing in the modern city, this studio returns to the elements of architecture to identify the original basis of this segregation. It begins with questions of dwelling as an activity, then as a built form. It deconstructs the elements of housing, and studies the gaps between the defined and confined ‘rooms’ of housing, articulating ways to connect or segregate. Thresholds become the main protagonist in this study that includes elements such as walls, partitions, floors, and eventually the whole carcass of the architecture of housing, in order to reveal the thresholds and boundaries of these spaces.

This studio begins with the question of what are the relevant forms of housing today. Housing is an inherently conservative form of architecture; carrying the burden to facilitate society with questions of collectivity and society; scale and repetition; and economy of construction and policy. It is therefore not surprising that housing has been a site of utopian thought in architecture. Housing was envisioned especially by architects of the early 20th century when the ideas developed complemented ideologies of change, through rethinking the forms of housing with a promise for a better society.

Can housing still change society today? Or conversely, can housing change in order to re-orientate the society we have today? What is the role of housing today, when we have been led to believe that it is just another consumer product in the marketplace? Is housing a highly segregated function in today’s city or can it blend back into the continuous space of the city? Is housing charged with the same sociopolitical ambitions of the past, in the way it inserts itself into the many facets of daily life? The site for this investigation is simultaneously fictional and actual, imagined and constructed. As the studio progresses, it addresses these questions and more by looking in detail at Hong Kong and Seoul as conditions for further exploration.
Soaring property prices in the past few years have given Hong Kong the top rank in ‘Most Unaffordable Housing’ in the world, for the fifth year straight, according to a survey of 360 cities by US-based consultancy Demographia. The survey reports that Hong Kong’s median home price is more than HK$4.02 million, nearly 1/15th of its annual median household income of HK$270,000. Housing affordability in Hong Kong was rated by Demographia as ‘severely unaffordable’.

Buying a home is mere fantasy for young people, but even renting a flat is too expensive. ‘Hong Kong’s young people want to untie the apron strings and live independently. Most cannot do so. Many live in their parents’ homes into their thirties,’ says Rosanna Wong, executive director of the Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups. For those who have to move out of their parents’ homes, the 4-7 square meter subdivided flats appear to be the only choice.

The need for affordable youth housing is one of urgency for Hong Kong. Instead of finding new land in remote areas or converting industrial buildings, as proposed by the HKSAR Government, this studio explores the possibility of ‘occupying’ the heart of Hong Kong city with youth housing. At the Occupy Central movement in 2014, young people occupied the streets of Hong Kong Central. This studio looks at the notion of occupancy architecturally, and brings forward the presence of young people’s living to the densest area in Hong Kong. The ‘occupy’ action of youth housing could enable an unconventional proximity among various urban activities and catalyze communication among various social, cultural and age groups.
This course investigates how to productively combine the spatio-temporal and performative merits of courtyard housing with drive-in home garages, in the context of high-end, high-rise housing. It is not a rare case to drive six stories up or down to park in some shopping malls in Hong Kong. The combination of a high-rise and a courtyard with home garages seems contradictory, as courtyards are common in low-rise housing typologies. However, the attributes of a courtyard potentially nurture a new vertical housing type. Borrowing the essential relationships of the physical parts to the spatial void, from the courtyard to the high-rise, the courtyard typology with a garage could be transformed into a vertical organization that uses less land in a central urban location.
Housing development after World War II in Europe was largely dominated by a need and paradigm of functionalism and industrialization. However, as programme and society changed, housing built in this period became inflexible and inadapt-able, and proved too costly to be upgraded later on, from both an ecological and an economic perspective.

Today, housing industrialization and standardization features large in an industry of prefabricated building structure, façade and infill components. This is encouraged by the national industrial policy in China. The rapid and large-scale urban development in China has yet to find new design strategies, which address the essential quality of cities and the building industry, to sustain a long-term future by learning from the shortcomings of the housing developments in Europe after WW II.

This studio is an investigation into the prefabrication of buildings. It starts with an investigation into individual needs and from there extends to the life-span of buildings and its correlation with the new industry of prefabrication.
‘Real form pre-supposes real life. [...] We should judge not so much by the results as by the creative process. For it is just this that reveals whether the form is derived from life or invented for its own sake. Life is what is decisive for us. In all its plenitude and in its spiritual and material relations.’ – Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, Die Form, 1924

Housing is at once the mainstay of our built environment and the extent of our private sphere; a second skin. As such it is hugely important and contentious, notoriously difficult as a sector and prone to failure. Whereas vast improvements today in all kinds of arenas are undisputable, housing, with some exceptions, remains either stuck in the past or alienated from its inhabitants.

Today’s variety of housing could be seen as positive but also may well be the source of the problem: resulting in urban cacophonies where all kinds contradictory architectural, social and philosophical approaches are found side-by-side, handing the ultimate hand to the market and in turn amplifying social conflicts, short-sightedness and fragmentation.

In this context, the Integral Housing studio seeks for more productive ways to reflect our pluralist times: The studio guides the quest, by the diametrically opposing architectural grammars of Mies’ flexibility, through non-specificity and generous sizes, with Alexander’s and Häring’s tight fit of local specificity and intermeshed systems. It addresses part-to-whole relationships, fitness, identity, and indexicality very differently, sharing the goal of coherence and authenticity. The high density of mass housing in Asia may offer a new angle to the exploration of a contemporary synthesis. The studio catalyses this through expanding the size of operation: projecting residential fabrics to fill a whole city block in the central area of Bangkok, enabling a seamlessly integration into the neighbourhood and the city at large. This also asks for a wide range of programmes to go beyond current mixed-use examples. This expanded scale of operation is harnessed for a systemic intermeshing of social spaces of varying privacy – a city within a city. On different scales, the studio develops modalities for contextual and climate-responsive, relational and combinatory planning, design and construction processes.
In January 2016, the Seoul Metropolitan Government announced the Changsin-Sungin rejuvenation project. The announcement began with the claim that ‘Changsin-dong, located in Jongno-gu, is proof of the value in preserving the past’ as a site that is ‘a repository of stories that have accumulated throughout Korea’s history.’ Once a thriving community, Changsin-dong has fallen into decline. The rejuvenation project is part of the city’s overarching attempt to transform ageing sites into a ‘regionally-centred renewal’ of specialized districts, increasing their economic value and reactivating existing communities.

Taking into account the various grassroots projects and businesses that have also emerged within the district, the studio dives into the Changsin-dong site through the histories that have continued to be produced during this process of community remaking. How can architecture effectively participate in these stories? What is the architecture of housing in a context where dwelling is, from the onset, a site of production as well as the familial home? What are the architectures, spaces and aesthetics of these hybrid domesticities? How can we map these spatial networks and analyse them from afar?

In order to sustain existing communities and anticipate new or future groups, especially the younger working adults who will be attracted to the textile and related cultural industries, astute and resourceful planning and design strategies are needed. In this context, the studio pays particular attention to the types of housing that need to be built; whom they need to be built for; and where and how they should be built.

1 http://english.seoul.go.kr/rebirth-city-changsin-sungin-area-rejuvenation-project/
The housing designs advocated by modernism since the 1920s call to mind images of concrete blocks and strong gestures of rationalization, repetition and authority. These images explain the technical preference of the re-construction boom after World War II. The tremendous demand for efficiency in construction was the most appropriate and immediate response to the massive destruction, but it was not too long before this stand for a unitary approach to a housing typology, and its distribution, in conforming to social order was questioned. The decade following WW II saw a shift towards a more humanistic approach in architectural design. It started with the revival of the Scandinavian tradition of respect for the role of the dweller. This thinking contrasted sharply with modernist housing parameters, and a process fully taken charge of by administrators and professionals. That way of living, defined by a top-down approach, was sure to be short-lived.

This studio re-investigates housing as a sustainable and on-going process, further exploring the bottom-up approach in housing design and the making of an environment for informal evolution. Key seminal works are researched to understand their social and technological significance. The studio has a core duty to propose various possibilities in habitable space, for and by a participatory design process. It forms the learning base for developing the final housing project by the end of the semester.
The studio agenda is to design innovative support structures to enable Mongolia’s Ger districts to evolve into viable urban settlements. We design the city from the inside-out. Starting with augmenting the basic unit of habitation – the traditional Ger tent – we then challenge the existing plot boundary and explore its potential as an architectural and infrastructural device. We work back and forth between scales; from the plot, to the cluster, to the district, to devise an incremental strategy that demonstrates how the Ger districts can evolve over time.

The Ger districts have grown into a sprawling suburbia of traditional felt tents, or Gers, intermingled with detached houses. In each case, each plot lacks basic urban infrastructure. There are few public resources, and the idea of the civic or communal is not intrinsic to the nomadic culture. In fact, the most public space is what we would assume to be the most private - the Ger itself – used to welcome and entertain guests. These temporary structures, designed for mobility, are now becoming fixed. As people become more sedentary they adapt and expand their Ger. These incremental improvements however only occur at the level of the plot, based on the individual desires of each family. The challenge of the studio is to harness this natural process of incremental improvements but channel it towards fundamental improvements to the urban realm through infrastructure, programming and public spaces.
‘The Hong Kong Memory’ Project collects and archives significant facets of the city from a grass-roots instead of an official perspective. With its approach of understanding the city through the lens of ‘local’ and ‘everyday-life’ stories, it is meant ‘to share, evoke and articulate Hong Kong people’s memories.’ In order to anchor this online archive onto real places, its physical manifesto calls for an architecture that is essential yet critical to translate these audio-visual memories into tangible spatial containments.

As a threshold to allow the communities to appreciate their own past, the architecture brings forth a vivid and lively interpretation of the Hong Kong Memory that is relevant to their current conditions. This interpretation is central to arouse empathetic inputs and inspire further creative responses. In this connection, there is a strategy of memory, not to arouse nostalgia but ‘to guard against collective amnesia.” The derivative of this strategy is to localize the past and to reflect the present, so the architecture is toned as a ‘living’ environment that embraces a particular aspect of life to arouse the memory of the place.

The studio is a research-based design laboratory. The exploration is intended to develop a model for community-based archive/museum with a living component [as a source of livelihood and financial subsidy]. The agenda is to create a feasible urban scenario with cultural and livelihood overlays where ‘micro urban regeneration’ can happen in real place to conserve as well as to continue the local flavor of living.
The problems of urban development after Second World War II were largely caused by the design pedagogy which was dominated by function. As the program changed fast the buildings built in this period proved to be inflexible and inadaptable, and were too costly to upgrade. By learning these mistakes architects need to find a new design pedagogy which addresses the essential quality of cities and buildings that are sustainable for hundreds of years.

This studio is a study of the lasting quality of buildings and cities independent from the program, and deeply rooted in the thinking of time. For that reason, we have to break with the idea of building purely in terms of use. The primacy of fulfilling a use has to be replaced by beauty as the central objective of architectural design, because beauty is the quality which leads to the social and cultural acceptance of a building. Social and cultural acceptance are the most important premises for a building’s longevity.

Students are invited to develop an architectural concept of University and change through space and time. The studio program invites ideas of the active, lively, dynamic, energizing city which is transformative and responding to the change of activity, climate, need or purpose in everyday life. The interaction between the events and structure is constant phenomenon, which invites active transformation of form and spaces. Architecture is not monument, but the process of operation.
Ludwig Mies van der Rohe coined the sentence “Architecture starts when you carefully put two bricks together. There it begins.”

Architecture today rarely starts from a craft. In most cases we are very dependent on existing technologies, material systems, and contractors and their craftsmanship, thus making it very difficult to innovate or even control the quality of a project.

However, we are witnessing a shift in architecture that has the capacity to bring us closer again to materiality, craft and technology. Computation, new software packages and innovative CAD/CAM construction methods have paved the way for designers and architects to engage much more in the construction of a building. With the advent of robotic fabrication in Architecture we are now witnessing the next step in this evolution. The architect can now invent and define the technology, craft and material system from scratch, giving new opportunities for innovation.

With these exciting developments on the horizon, the studio has two main objectives. On one hand it’s a hands-on investigation on how to generate new technologies, material systems and craftsmanship with the aid of the robot, on the other hand the studio looks in what way we can apply those for the development of full scale performative architectural prototypes.
The global housing crisis emerging from the 2008 economic crash has sparked off growing concerns, both locally and globally, about overcrowded urban housing. The examples seen so frequently in Hong Kong, such as cage housing, subdivisions, shoe-box housing, micro-housing and the overcrowding of housing resonate with similar tendencies emerging globally.

With this in mind, this studio looks at how to develop the minimum amount of space while integrating the concept of Co-Living. How can we architects find responses to the growing demand for flexibility within housing, but also the need for communal living? More importantly, how can architects connect with the emerging field of the ‘shared economy’.

This studio analyzes the current debate on Co-Living and Micro-Housing. It analyzes the shared economy and start-up businesses related to Co-Living and Co-Working — both globally and locally. The studio investigates how the notion of ‘share’ is understood in each of the investigated Co-living models. We study how these are branded and engineered, how they are calculated, who they are made for, and how they are eventually manifested in architecture. The studio also contemplates the future of housing, taking Hong Kong’s requirements as the best and worst extremes, with a view to creating innovative ideas of Co-Living and Co-working.
Set against a backdrop of continuing environmental pressure, uncertainty, and increasing social inequity, this studio seeks alternative modes of architecture that respond holistically to the interrelated problems which occur when a city is designed for maximum efficiency. This studio investigates the possibility for architecture to serve the common wealth of all by creating a new form of urban ecology. Throughout this studio we seek to not only investigate innovative architectural prototypes, but also to examine a diverse set of issues related to sustainability and quality of life.

The studio responds to a unique site condition, following the Hong Kong Institute of Planners proposal to pedestrianize Des Voeux Road Central. This proposition can be read primarily as an attempt to address surrounding air quality and pollution, which are by products of both Des Voeux Road Central's spatial arrangement and its patterns of use.

Defined by the less tangible elements of the site, found within the humanitarian, creative, intellectual, psychological, ecological, and technological possibilities of a work of architecture, the outcome of the studio is to form the capacity to construct a sustained argument by addressing a vast range of issues. The juxtaposition between the public spaces designed for the initial project and the strategy to extend out to the rest of the building describes innovative alternatives for working in the metropolis. The final projects identify and interpret critical questions being investigated, prioritize often incongruent objectives, while developing an individualistic sense of agency, intentionality, and accountability.
This studio serves as a kick-off of a 5-year research plan of the Faculty of Architecture, with the intent to assist Chang’an Town of Dongguan, China, in its urban development in the next decade. Sponsored by the Chang’an government, the studio is devoted to the research and design exploration of the issues emerging from an actual site and live project in Chang’an.

Sited on the midpoint of the east coast of the Big Bay Area, Chang’an is gaining tremendous new momentum for its future development. To explore a new model of urbanization in the next decade, Chang’an government has commissioned our Faculty of Architecture as its think-tank to conduct a series of related researches. This studio marks a kick-off of the Chang’an-HKU collaboration.

The studio investigates a particular site of Chang’an which is in a rather paradoxical situation. On the one hand, it is a significant spot where four major local/regional civic/infrastructural lines converge and intersect. On the other hand, the site, especially on its ground level, remains a completely abandoned space. All the vital civic/infrastructural lines either become the dead-end there or simply pass through it, generating no vitality in the place.

The studio explores a set of ‘urban acupunctural’ strategies to activate the site and catalyze Chang’an’s future development. Based on an in-depth study of the site in relation to the region, the Town, and its immediate surrounding environment, each student is expected to develop an action plan and design proposal.
There is a large population who dwell in substandard living conditions outside of Hong Kong’s formal housing options. Due to the disproportionate high cost of housing in the private market, many of those who do not qualify for public housing turn to the informal housing sector such as squatters on village lands, rooftop houses, cage cubicles and subdivided units (SDU).

In this course, we conduct research on the residents’ living situations as well as the physical conditions of the sub-divided flats and the host buildings. The primary objectives of this project are to improve the spatial quality, lighting condition, air ventilation and circulation, as well as the general living condition of the homes.

Students in this course explore the role of architecture in creating, defining and enlivening habitation space in the contemporary city through experiential learning and knowledge exchange. The course offers an opportunity for students to use their knowledge, skill and creativity as architects to make positive impacts on their local community through the design and fabrication of a built structure. It requires work within strict constraints of budget and schedule as well as building code and client requirements. Architectural design is investigated through theoretical research, and the use of digital drawing and modeling programs combined with direct, hands-on material exploration. Working as individuals and in teams, students develop a position towards architecture’s role in the complex process of translation of ideas into the built form.
This is an experimental design studio on mass housing. The experimental setup is defined by the two cities involved: Hong Kong and Suzhou. In many aspects, historic Suzhou and modern Hong Kong are almost opposite places: one is horizontally, one vertically organized; one represents traditional Chinese culture, the other modernity at a large scale and in extreme density. What could happen if we combine the urban and architectural concepts and qualities of both cities in new ways?

The principal design task is to rethink the concept of modern high-rise housing from the point of view of the Classical Chinese garden. Starting with the analysis of one of the gardens, architectural principles are identified, evaluated and eventually translated into contemporary architectural forms.

The main design and research questions are: Can we better understand the scope and nature of the local climate change in the Suzhou metropolitan area? Is it possible to find data on the reasons for this change? If architecture is one of the factors causing the problems, then what could be a solution? Can we design high-rise buildings, which don't accumulate heat in the summer? Can we design buildings which don't depend on the use of electrical air conditioning? Can we design buildings which help cool and clean the air? Can we design buildings located in the middle of an Endless City, looking as beautiful as a garden? Can the relation between vegetation and modern architecture be redefined?
As globalization and digitalization threaten to flatten or neutralize the complex issues of context, identity, and memory, we seek to re-engage the city by understanding its very essence on a micro level. Through unconventional mediums and methodologies, we hope to uncover a way of generating architecture that is as richly complex and imprecise as the people we meet and places we inhabit.

This studio is a multidisciplinary studio—from urban scale to architectural, interiors to furniture—that places emphasis on both research and design. We begin our investigation firmly grounded in a real place, Hong Kong, but explore it anecdotally through personal encounters and narratives, documenting it with film, photography, text and found objects. The next part of the journey utilizes fiction, in the form of a novel or a film, as a lens through which to uncover further narratives on inhabitation and domesticity within the city. With narrative as our instrument, we derive speculative spaces in fragments, that are then woven back together into a spatial journey. And to come full circle, we apply the narrative journey to a real site, in Shanghai, where stories become walls and fiction becomes fact.
In the recent decades there is an incredible amount of energy, attention, and resources being poured into issues relating to the cities’ formation, especially in the developing world. What rarely gets discussed is the development of its opposite, the “left over”, from this exodus. When massive populations, particularly young people, flood into cities what will happen to the aging “ghost-villages?” What lies the future of them?

During the Spring of 2015, a master of Architecture design studio from the Department of Architecture on Songyang, Zhejiang Province, was conducted to investigate issues relating to the countryside and its future possibilities of development. This studio continues the efforts on documentation, analysis and scrutiny on townships that are undergoing similar transformations. We travel to Anji, Zhejiang this time.

Anji is a town rich in both natural and human resources, but similar to other townships, it is suffering from a massive exodus to cities surrounding the Yangtze River Delta (YRD) region. The rich cultural and economic potential of Anji imply that there are hard-ware waiting for the departed young people.

This studio attempts to identify the “software” that could contribute to the reversal of this one-way urbanization process. Issues such as pollution and clean energy, agriculture and handicraft, mode of production and strategic programming, eco-tourism and local economy are discussed and debated in the course.
Could one consider alternative building types for Hong Kong that challenge the point-block additive approach? Building types that reassert the prominence of community living, of integrated infrastructure and urban connectors, while still stimulating a high density occupancy? Building types that are conceived with greater integration and more active participation with their natural environment?

The overall building type under scrutiny for this term is the wall-building or slab-block. Architecturally, we rethink the articulation of a habitable wall by revisiting ideas of porosity, deep shaded space, thickness change, scalar transition, double-sidedness, structural facades, modularity, mass subtraction, linear distribution, ground articulation and integration to existing infrastructure. Environmentally, physical aspects such as wall effect in building, cross-ventilation, light exposure are also investigated. In doing so, we revisit the spatial and environmental performance of a wall as an urban manifesto.

Through hands-on participation with the performance of materials, students learn how to determine the exact contribution a material may bring to a hierarchical assembly of live forces at play - opportune to the notion of unpredictability in the design outcome.

The core objective is to influence the process of architectural design in reverse; that is by synthesizing an architectural proposal from the findings emerging from a succession of built experiments, thus to influence a range of architectural scales.
Low-density suburban developments are often associated with automobile oriented urban sprawl, enclave communities and lack of public life. Meanwhile, high-density megacities are traditionally associated with notions of congestion, lack of greenery and privacy, as well as low quality of architectural and urban spaces. Horizontal and vertical development has to both face challenges on their capability to moderate density, efficiency, accessibility, porosity, sustainability, as well as the quality of places and the human daily life they can accommodate.

This is a joint venture between vertical and horizontal, high and low density, Hong Kong and Helsinki, as well as HKU and AU. The outcome of the studio includes a series of inter-related design exercises measuring density, porosity, and sustainability.

The Hong Kong and Helsinki urban and environmental context is therefore highly relevant for pushing together the question from the opposite poles, not only between vertical and horizontal, high-density and low-density, but also sub-tropical and sub-arctic, communal and individual, public and private, living and working.

Through design explorations, the studio would like to demonstrate how to re-invent architectural typology for contemporary urban conditions, particularly when density has to be increased while nature has to be sustained. As such, the specificities between horizontal and vertical architecture and urban developments are negotiated and integrated through intense design experiments on architectural and urban typologies.
The arrival of Google Map/Earth images and Unmanned Aerial Vehicle photos (“Dronestagram”) prompt us to re-examine the relationship between what is nature and what is manmade in the environment. In the past, the representations of source images tend to affect our readings and at times flatten our understanding of what in fact could be some very dynamic relationships. For instance, the USGS map, with the continuous contour lines and monotone colors, implies uninterrupted topography to the untrained eyes. On the other hand, the figure-ground drawing while powerfully differentiating solid and void, nevertheless conveniently discounts one’s perception of the gradient and the in-between-ness.

The digital images provide us with opportunities to observe and contemplate our human settlements as landscapes of production first hand. We therefore realize that all elements are now interconnected. Their relationships are ever changing and never autonomous. On the one hand they are conditioned by the surrounding context, on the other they are part of the context, if not part of the driving force behind the formation of the context.

The studio intends to investigate the changing landscape of production/consumption and fabricate intervention with the existing network/interpreted context in search of new approaches of infrastructure/landscape/architecture design.

Keywords: Network, Increment, Performance, Instrument, Drawing, Mapping
This studio examines the issues raised by urban borderlands, specifically those interstitial areas that simultaneously connect and separate the Zhuhai SEZ and the Macau SAR. Urban borderlands are contested spaces with ambiguous identities and allegiances. They tend to be sites of conflict, negotiation, and exchange, which problematize the relationships between centre and periphery, path and destination. The site for the studio is the existing Zhuhai-Macau Cross-border Industrial Zone, a 0.4 km2 area that spans the border between the Gongbei neighbourhood of Zhuhai and the Ilha Verde neighbourhood of Macau. Students are required to create a new masterplan, which entails the selective reuse of industrial heritage and an engagement with the existing waterfront. The focus of the masterplan is to be a hybrid architectural complex that incorporates a new border-crossing facility.

The studio combines analyses of historical prototypes and experiments with contemporary techniques in order to develop a hybrid building according to the definition above. Design techniques to be investigated include the manipulation of porosity at every scale (ground surface, water edge, territorial border, urban layout, architectural massing, building envelope), the use of circulation patterns to generate architectural form, and the superimposition of incongruous compositional systems to create visual ambiguity and complexity. Proposals should critically address the contrasts of water and land, nature and artifice, continuity and individuation, difference and repetition, but must also meet functional objectives in terms of access, programmatic relationships, and respond to wider climatic and contextual influences. The result is a hybrid structure that straddles the scales and ambitions of architecture and urbanism.
“Rereading” always has a specific target. The subject could be a great architectural work from the past, or even one entire city or region. Students who participate in the task are expected to research the subject’s background, program, quality of space and historical significance, and to actually visit the site if circumstances allow, in order to interpret the subject from personal perspectives and experiences.

“Rereading” is a reconstruction of the subject in our time. As the goal, we will design a space that is given the same program as the subject, with a scale of more than 20,000 SQM.

At the onset of the studio, we add a new approach to the assignment of “rereading.” That is to target an unbuilt building, which is a project that did not come into shape, but has left a big impact. This time, it is a competition proposal for Hong Kong Peak, designed by Zaha Hadid. The task starts with a thought on why rereading her Hong Kong Peak Club competition design matters now.
Convergence (Late Latin convergere, to incline together)
To tend towards a common conclusion or result.

Hong Kong’s MTR system became one of the most advanced mass transport systems on the planet, by determining the city’s and larger region’s urban growth aligned with its linear network of stations. MTR is spearheading each nodal development themselves with others following keenly, which brought about an ever increasing sprinkling of surreal high-density blobs within rural and peripheral areas. This is in stark contrast to most cities’ radial and mostly even dissipation of density away from the centre and is a major contributor to the city’s current low carbon footprint.

However, while time, scale, connectivity and distances have been positively skewed, planning regulations, development habits and subjective notions are still reinforcing the contrast between centre and periphery.

The studio seeks a comprehensive instrumental understanding of Hong Kong as an advanced nodal network to identify and address current shortcomings and opportunities for rebalancing the system towards its inhabitants. Quantitative and structural readings form the basis of the studio’s architectural projection of public programmes, representational civic spaces and local community centres. The goal is to establish a feedback loop, whereas the personal scale will intermesh with and feed upon mental projections and hierarchies of the city as resource and identity.
With more than 250 islands, mostly uninhabited, and fifty percent of the territory composed of water, Hong Kong has the potential to re-invent a positive future where human economies are re-balanced with new territorial ecologies. In this context, islands are fragments of land that are barely used, or rather, their various forms of occupation have often been kept secret by the successive Hong Kong governments. Rehabilitation center for drug addicts, low-nuclear waste management plant, isolated refugee camps, islands have since long been used for hosting the left-overs of our societies. The main objective of the studio is to re-territorialize those forgotten or invisible territories by defining a liquid trajectory starting from Aberdeen, passing through the South Lamma Chanel and the Soko Islands, winding-up with Lantau’s pre-historic settlement and ending in the new bridge infrastructure (Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge). Those various site opportunities should allow the development of multiple possible futures, beyond simple capitalistic and other materialistic perspectives.

Geography and the design fields intersect to define a project that develops an innovative approach leading to an inspiring design that is relevant and valuable to society and end users. Each project should combine elements of ecology and economy in relation to the human occupation (past or present). The liquid condition of the site and the nature of the studio progressively develops sets of relations – from the project to its immediate context – from each project to a minimum of two other student projects.
The keyword is 無何有之郷 – a tract where there is nothing else. 莊子, Zhuang Zhou (Zhuangzi), Chinese philosopher:

Huizi said to Zhuangzi, ‘I have a large tree, which men call the Ailantus. Its trunk swells out to a large size, but is not fit for a carpenter to apply his line to it; its smaller branches are knotted and crooked, so that the disk and square cannot be used on them. Though planted on the wayside, a builder would not turn his head to look at it. Now your words, Sir, are great, but of no use - all unite in putting them away from them.’

Zhuangzi replied, ‘Have you never seen a wildcat or a weasel? There it lies, crouching and low, till the wanderer approaches; east and west it leaps about, avoiding neither what is high nor what is low, till it is caught in a trap, or dies in a net. Again there is the Yak, so large that it is like a cloud hanging in the sky. It is large indeed, but it cannot catch mice. You, Sir, have a large tree and are troubled because it is of no use - why do you not plant it in a tract where there is nothing else, or in a wide and barren wild? There you might saunter idly by its side, or in the enjoyment of untroubled ease sleep beneath it. Neither bill nor axe would shorten its existence; there would be nothing to injure it. What is there in its uselessness to cause you distress?’

Zhuangzi expressed his idea of the ideal place through this word 無何有之郷: a place where nothing exists or a place belonging to nowhere. No possession, no restraint where everything is permitted.

This studio asks students to design a resort hotel in Japan. The location is inside a golf course in Chiba prefecture near Tokyo.
The thesis platform Ecologies Sustainability Recycling works in, and occupies, is a physical environment that is under constant transformation – the effects of which we experience gradually through an expansive history, or dramatically in instants. Our spatial and sensorial experiences are formed by design through cycles of environmental, material, cultural, political, and economic ecologies.

This platform studies, reinterprets, and innovates through an engagement with these dynamic and inherently spatial ecologies over time. Working across disciplinary boundaries, the theses are invested in the fields of architecture, landscape, urbanism, bringing in knowledge from engineering, science, economics, history, and politics. The research and design projects investigate and create new spatial conditions in the urban realm and designed environment. Cycles and patterns of growth, reuse, decay, obsolescence, and transformation are considered as productive forces or, in some cases, as methodologies for exploring new forms, contexts, materials, and environmental conditions.

The ambition of the platform is not to offer ‘solutions’ to the multitude of ecological issues and environmental crises we face, but to offer new ways of seeing, interpreting, experiencing, or intervening in their spatial and cultural impacts – while offering charged trajectories that challenge current trends or standards. Ultimately, these theses will not be ends in and of themselves, but will introduce new knowledge, questions, and topics of enquiry for continued exploration and study.
Geography, Landscape, and Infrastructure are not the preoccupations of architects. Geography is too large, Landscape belongs to another discipline, and Infrastructure is the domain of engineers. We feel that architects need to look more carefully at how they build buildings, plan cities, and how their designs change environments. The rapid development of the twenty-first century cannot continue to destroy geographies, demolish landscapes, and build infrastructures that are uncritical responses to the functioning of territories and cities. Architects need to design by understanding the specificity of geographies and their consequences on the built environment. They need to understand landscape as a mediator and as a rational organic system that links and unites, and has both form and function. This then allows landscape to be perceived as heritage. Architects also need to pay more attention to the design of infrastructure as new types of sustainable cities. This research platform allows speculative debates on the relationship of these three scales of architecture allowing the architect to liberate her/himself from being a mere designer of objects.

According to its 2015 department of planning, Hong Kong could be the perfect model of sustainability only if it continues to over densify, preserve its natural landscape and reshape its contourline – Is this really the case?
The Thesis Platform “Living, Cities, the Countryside and the Rural” approaches design through the understanding that broader contextual forces, from socio-economic to political economy, shape urban and architectural form. The platform frames an architectural proposition, encompassing typological, programmatic, circulation, structural, material, and urban interface strategies and more. It sees these as crucial to also impacting and reshaping the surrounding context of architecture, whether urban or non-urban. Context specificity is thus methodologically essential for the platform, and contextual analysis is a crucial and iterative part of the design process. With a focus on architectural propositions as urban or rural strategy, in high-density built environments specific to the region around Hong Kong, the thesis proposition is expected to demonstrate the qualifying student’s intelligence, criticality, social awareness, and engagement to analyze, evaluate, synthesize, and intelligently advance propositions for the built environment, using discipline-specific tools.
The broader agenda of the thesis platform MTR is centered around the implications and specificities of material, technology, and robotics, in architecture and the built environment with an interest in construction, structures, digital knowledge, and fabrication.

Rather than considering the thesis as a complete project at the end of the student’s formal education, the platform encourages students to experiment, innovate and take risks within less familiar contexts and towards new design trajectories. The thesis stimulates design discoveries at the beginning of a life-long journey in architecture.

The platform places a strong emphasis on testing the thesis of the individual students by means of physical and digital modeling within an iterative process, in order to arrive at novel design propositions. Students are encouraged to reflect on an existing body of knowledge in the expanded field of architecture and to contribute to the research by producing work that is innovative yet grounded. The main focus of the design process is placed on the progression of clear design methodologies with a particular emphasis on prototyping.
The thesis platform makes no claim to a monopoly on politics, art or media. Contemporary architecture is necessarily implicated in the larger social, cultural and economic fields that comprise the matter of cities, spaces, places and things. Rather, our students propose methodologies, modes of analysis and strategies for intervention that focus on problematizing these fields in ways that make inquiry and speculation possible.

By delimiting the work of the platform, we do lay claim to architecture’s role in mediating an understanding of the larger world – both as an imperfect mirror and as a projective tool that describes alternatives. We ask students to be conscious of questions of agency in architecture, and to recognize that architecture itself can be understood as a construct – mediated and manipulated for the interests of some, such that power and capital circumscribe its capacities.

Rather than ‘the future’, ‘progress’ or the ‘new’, the work of the platform lies in seeing differently, in looking in unexpected ways, and in asking questions of architecture – and of the world – that in their very articulation, raise others. What would be a failure is if architecture’s relation to this world was based on a comfortable, normative set of assumptions rather than an insistent, persistent and productive anxiety.

The ‘project’ as such, is an interrogation of what it means to do, make and think through architecture in the context of contemporary complexity. The challenge our students face is to deploy the discipline in ways of their fashioning, that will inevitably shape their practice and potentially the spaces we inhabit.
The PhD Programme in architecture is a four-year research degree offering independent research under the supervision of members of staff in the areas of history and theory of architecture; urbanism and habitation; architectural and sustainable technologies; analysis and development of buildings; landscapes and regions; and urbanism with attention on high-density, compact cities, housing research and design methods, - all with a focus on social, cultural, economic, technological, ecological and infrastructural systems.

The Programme is intended for those who wish to enter teaching and advanced research careers in architecture, and make an original contribution to the field. It serves as an incubator for young researchers, and a platform to establish a robust, scholarly hub committed to an understanding of the planetary emergencies confronting architecture and cities. The Programme places an emphasis on originality, significance, and methodology in topics that engage pertinent issues in Asia and China, and the intersections of these with international and cross-cultural contexts.

Academic training opportunities are available and extend beyond coursework. On successful completion of their first year of coursework, students are encouraged to participate in the instructional activities of the department. These include teaching assistantships in the University Common Core courses and departmental lecture courses. The Department also runs a number of workshops on specific research topics and methods, ranging from archival research to grant writing. These workshops are led by distinguished visiting or HKU professors, and are designed to deepen students’ knowledge of particular methods and topics, and exposing them to different forms of intellectual inquiry and methodological frameworks. Students are required to take four Graduate School core courses and four faculty/departmental courses before the submission of the dissertation. Students shall be required to have satisfactorily completed all the Graduate School courses and at least 50% of the remaining prescribed coursework by the end of the probationary period. For confirmation of PhD candidature or transferal from MPhil to PhD candidature, students must pass the qualifying examination, followed by the submission of their dissertation research proposal.

The Department’s CIB Student Chapter organizes international conferences at regular intervals. These events provide research postgraduate students with a forum to present their current research to the public, meet graduate students from other parts of the world and relevant faculty from outside HKU.

The Research Programme is supported by regular organized visits by renowned international scholars from leading schools, including Ball State University, US; Columbia University, New York; DTU, Denmark; ETH, Zurich; UNSW, Australia; NUS, Singapore; Tsinghua University, Beijing; Tongji University, Shanghai; TUDelft, The Netherlands; and University of California, Berkeley.

Admission
Eligibility for admission to the Programme is generally limited to students holding a Master of Architecture degree, a Bachelor of Architecture degree with honors, or a Master’s degree (or equivalent) in the field of architecture. However, students who hold a Master’s degree or equivalent in another field may also be considered for admission. All application regulations, deadlines and procedures are available at: www.gradsch.hku.hk.