

## **TOKYO AND THE FUTURE OF HYPERDENSITY**

### **Global Studio in Architecture and Development**

The Director's Studio/Advanced Studio VI

Spring 2013

Critics:

**Galia Solomonoff and Andy Vann, Architecture**

**Vishaan Chakrabarti and Omar Toro-Vaca, Development**

"We worry about crises, and break down in the global economy, and terrorism, nuclear blackmail and war...but the largest problems are the product not of failure but of success."

Fareed Zakaria, *The Post American World*, 2008

### **Intellectual and Institutional Context**

In *Generic City* (1993), Koolhaas describes a future successfully dense, yet indistinct city. In this scenario, people have blended beyond recognizable racial traces; cities have copied each other's salient traits; all territories regardless of geographic or climatic challenges have been conquered at a relentless pace producing self-similar cities all over the globe. In this narrative, the generic city thrives, yet upon arrival can be confused with any other. The transit hubs are seamless, density triumphant, and a strong work ethic prevalent. Koolhaas positions this scenario as aspiration and as cautionary tale. By contrast, Tokyo—far from a generic dense city—faces problems all its own; problems of shrinkage, environmental decay, and an affordability crisis which are the focus of this studio.

In coordination with Hulic, the Japanese real estate company, the studio will be traveling to Tokyo over spring break. Comprised of architecture and real estate students, the studio will explore problems seemingly unique to a culture where building hyperdensity has long been the norm. But in Tokyo too lies a cautionary tale in the productive friction that produced the Ginza district, which emerged as a marketplace of western ideals tempered by Tokyo's unique street culture. This tension speaks to a local-global set of issues that are as much about identity and branding as they are about consumption and production of cities, neighborhoods, and buildings alike.

### **Studio Theme: Hyperdense Tokyo**

Tokyo represents the best and most extreme model we have for hyperdense urban morphology. With densities of over 150 units/acre, modern Tokyo represents some of the most economically and environmentally sound development in the world, all while maintaining an atmosphere of exuberant street life and urbane counterculture. However many of the challenges that question the current form of cities worldwide confront Tokyo as well. The society is aging, growth has slowed, suburbs are gaining in popularity, affordable housing is scant, socioeconomic diversity is rare, public funding for infrastructure is scarce, and threats to the city from climate change are increasingly real. It is within this context that this interdisciplinary studio will take on the challenge of establishing new forms of living and working in contemporary Tokyo with a particular emphasis on the theoretical outer limits of hyperdensity as discussed in the program section below.

## Project Sites

The project will toggle between two sites and scales: an existing 1,500 sq meter site located in the heart of Ginza, and the massive Tokyo Bay project, which has been a subject of architectural conjecture throughout the post-War era. The point of the two sites is to be able to explore and test architecture and development hypotheses at two drastically different scales, one at the scale of the city at large with enormous implications in terms of climate change and sea level rise, urban infrastructure, food production, energy usage, and so forth; and the second at the architectural scale of a building, for which proposals should engage many of these same issues within the framework of a single piece of architecture. Students working in teams will work on both sites in the order they see fit; for instance, a team could choose to work on the individual building site first, and extrapolate lessons to the larger urban design proposition, or work in the opposite direction, from big to small. Ideally, students would work iteratively across scales throughout the semester.

## Program

The program is left up to the students, with the caveat that the program must meet or exceed the existing zoning allowance for the project sites. The studio will explore an essential programmatic question regarding the hypothetical outer limits of hyperdensity. What parameters limit density? Absent municipal zoning controls, is density limited by core infrastructural concerns such as water, power, or sewage; is density limited by planning concerns such as light and air, depression, or inequity; is density limited by technological concerns such as elevators, seismic resilience, or airspace interference; is density limited by development concerns such as market saturation, user anonymity, or financing constraints? The studio asks the students to explore these questions of internal and external density limitations unfettered by regulation. Program types should ideally be mixed, drawing upon new spatial demands for housing across income and age spectrums, workspace, culture, technology, healthcare and wellness, manufacturing, entertainment, public space, food, energy, and so forth.

## Schedule

Lottery: January 23

First studio session: January 25, 2:00-4:00pm 200 Fayeweather

Delivery of research: February 18

Midterm: March 11

Trip to Tokyo: spring break; specific March dates TBD

Final: Monday, May 6 from 10:00am to 4:00pm

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