

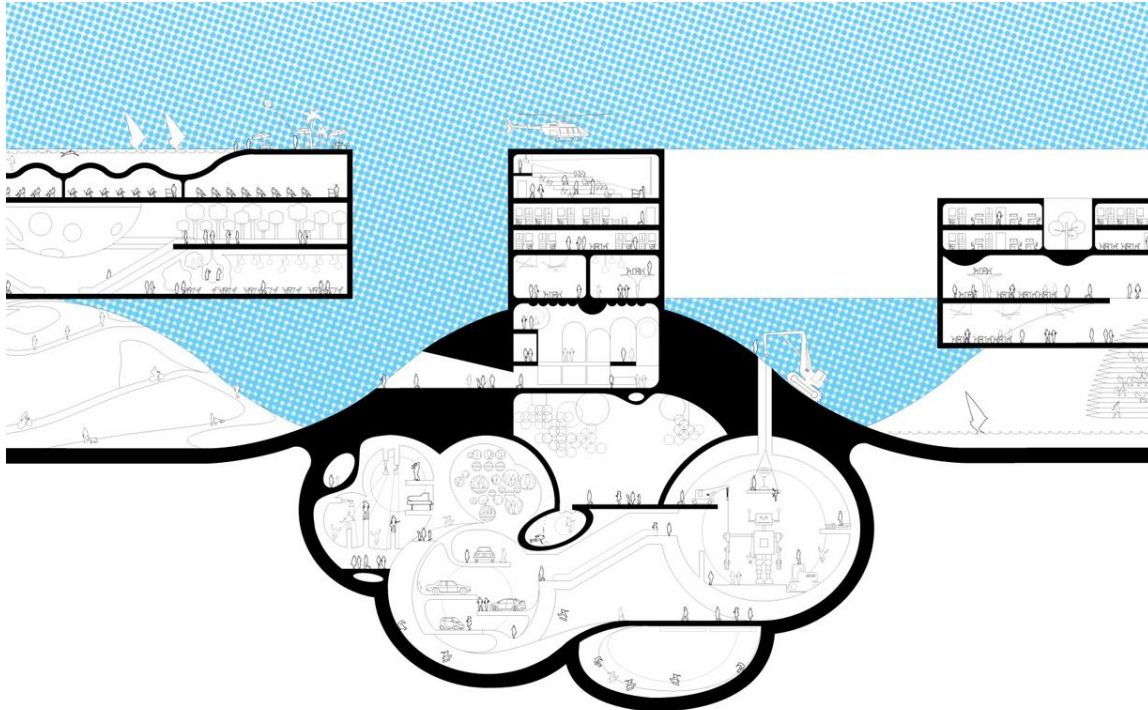
GSAPP Spring 2015 | Advanced Studio VI

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# What if...? Then...

Urban-scaled Architectural Speculation in Beijing



Can we invent an urban-scaled architecture that is both formally compelling and ecologically sound?

The studio will engage and explore the formal and programmatic possibilities of invented large-scale architecture in the city. In a back-and-forth process with key historic projects we will develop a series of design-based scenarios that leverage specific qualities of the city, and will seek to mine these scenarios for their formal possibilities. The studio will operate in a “slack space” to allow us freedom from the historical and theoretical significance of the key historic projects. Formal and spatial invention will be our goal. Sites will be chosen for their latent possibilities. Ecological, economic, and political justifications will be employed as necessary. Programs will be pushed beyond their logical extremes.

First we will speculate on what might have been. To look back at projects of the past and interrogate them for what they might have been. Through a process of collage and montage (old fashioned, but dependable), we will speculate on how the introduction of difference might have changed these projects. For example, we will ask questions such as: What if Superstudio’s Continuous Monument had an interior? And, what if Yona Friedman lived in Beijing (instead of Paris)?

Our speculations will not supported by any hard evidence, nor will they be able to be proven. They will be imaginary and factually questionable. But we will create coherent and precise (graphic) arguments for our speculations. We will develop a formal language. We will pursue multiple possible scenarios, compiling a catalog of speculations.

Although we will look carefully at megastructure projects of the recent past, our references will also include the Tower of Babel and the Ponte Vecchio. We will appropriate and hybridize. We will play with megabuilding types like mat buildings and wall buildings.

The studio's site is an outlying area of the super-fast growing megalopolis of Beijing. The city is both famous and infamous for its growth: a duality of plenty (economic gains) and scarcity (clean air, clean water). The speculative projects we develop will ultimately be swallowed by the ever-expanding megalopolis. We will anticipate and design scenarios for this absorption and envelopment. We will posit that architecture can be both/and — it can be both pro-development and pro-environment through the manipulation of form and the tactical deployment of ecologically based systems. With the addition of program, we will imagine new forms of collective associations as promised by Modernism. But, whereas Modernism proposed rationality and singularities to deal with the problems and potentials of the city, we will play with irrationality and multiplicities. We will engage density directly. But heeding the predicted future of the "Generic City" in which cities becomes indistinct from one another, this studio will begin with a contrary hypothesis: we will view globalization as reinforcing differences in patterns of localized urban behavior, formal uniqueness and infrastructural specificity.

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