

XS

Excess: A Polemical Exploration of Scale

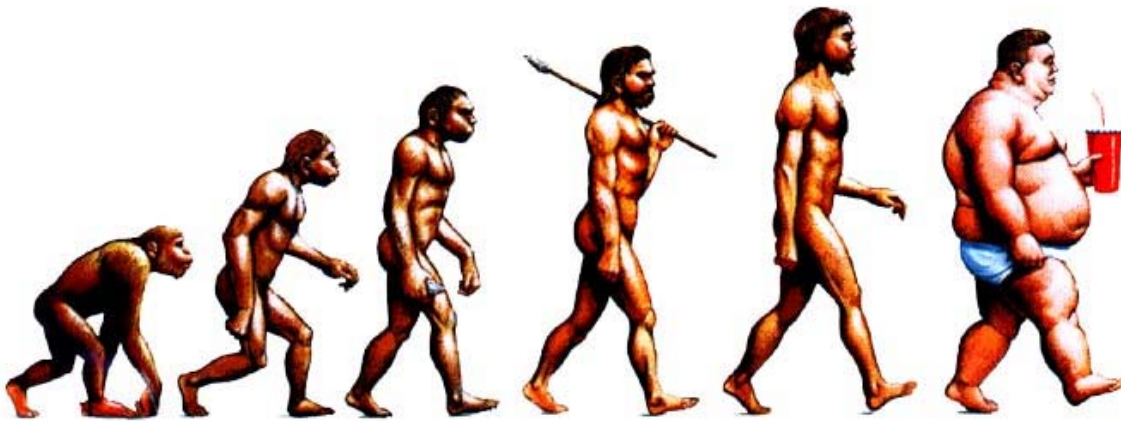
Columbia University GSAPP

Fall 2012

ADVANCED STUDIO V

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PROJECT

The Studio is an exploration of scale, its past founding relation to architecture and its present seeming demise and asks: is Scale still relevant to architecture, if so how and if not then what have we gained and what have we lost, if anything?

For centuries, Scale has been an essential ingredient of architecture. From classical antiquity's obsession with proportion, eurythmy and the perfect symmetry presented by the human body to the Italian Renaissance's anthropocentric model of the world which, as in Leonardo Da Vinci's Vitruvian Man, scaled all architecture to that of the (male) body. In the East, scale was also seen as fundamental to architecture even if not figural, whether observed in the Near East's Islamic abstract patterns, which expressed the infinite within their smallest part, or the Far East's play with perception to create perfect microcosms that mirrored the macrocosm beyond.

Modernism continued this obsession with Scale: stripping away meaning from proportion, architecture was left with its ability to produce beauty through pure geometry, a movement that was spearheaded by Le Corbusier's development of the Modular – at the intersection of the body and the Fibonacci Series – and supported by his fascination with the Golden Section. Interestingly, while Scale remained central, that of the body saw itself challenged by the advent of the car and the dramatic scale it produced in the new visions for the city, from Le Corbusier's Radiant City to Wright's Broadacre City, culminating in the post-humanist body's perceived alienation in visions such as those proposed by Hilberseimer.

With Postmodernism's rejection of Modernism's Universal body and the humanism it embodied, whether through gender, race or environmental critiques amongst other, Scale continued nevertheless to be operative both in art and architecture, now enlisted in the service of the various perspectives and positions emerging - from Oldenberg and Koons' overscaled 'found objects' to Godsworthy's land art and from Superstudio and Archizoom's fields to the Supergraphics of Venturi Scott Brown. Even the deconstruction movement continued this infatuation with Scale and the body in motion (Tschumi's Manhattan Transcripts or Hadid's early paintings.)

In 1993, Koolhaas launches his seminal manifesto 'Bigness and the Problem of Large,' where he writes: "Beyond a certain scale, architecture acquires the properties of BIGNESS. The best reason to broach BIGNESS is the one given by climbers of Mount Everest: "because it is there." BIGNESS is the ultimate architecture." As if proving the author right and despite the "clumsiness, slowness, inflexibility, difficulty" which could have led to its extension, Bigness has instead emerged, at the intersection of our digital world and the demands of the Global Spectacle, as the main if not the only manifestation of Scale in architecture.

This unconditional rule of Bigness can be expanded beyond Koolhaas's initial observations to almost everything: from the bloating of the single family home, to the seemingly unstoppable expansion of museums, the reach-to-the-sky of skyscrapers and to the 'as city phenomenon' affecting all types from airports to malls and to mega hotels. Ironically, rather than leaving the body behind, it is as if Bigness still tied architecture to the epidemic enlargement of our bodies and of our food, as experienced in a great part of the world in the last twenty years. While technology's feat is to continue to get smaller and smarter, as demonstrated by our contemporary 'Gizmos' – the computer and the phone - architecture seems to continue to get bigger and maybe dumber.

With the recent global financial crisis, Bigness may finally have encountered some doubt, as demonstrated by Robin Progrebin's recent NYTimes "For large institutions, thinking big can be suicidal" or the flurry of articles in Spain linking mega projects such as Eisenman's City of Culture or Calatrava's City of Arts and Science to the country's the current crisis. Yet, its reign is far from over: zooming out and faced with our environmental concerns, it is notable that much of the debates occurring around questions of density or infrastructure have not significantly or productively reframed architecture. Case in point: taking LEED as the most widely accepted measure of sustainable practice in the US at the scale of the building, it is unfortunately not surprising that there are no points to be earned for reducing size of any given program or engaging the issue of scale.

Given the outrageous differences in footprints across the globe, when one contrasts urban densities from Cairo to Florida, it seems urgent for Scale to be re-invented today in its relation to architecture to continue to produce effect, beauty, play or even meaning but also to engage in questions such as: is there an ethics of size? It is these explorations and more that the studio will engage in, building upon recent younger practices' engagement with scale (the fractal in Aranda Lasch, the parametric in MOS, the systematic in WORKac, the spatial in Fujimoto, the thin in Ishigami or the bold in FAT, amongst others) towards new radicalized approaches to Scale in architecture.

PROGRAM

As one of globalization's favorite icon for 'emerging' cities, the studio will use the Hotel as a pretext for the exploration of Scale. As a type that has seen its own exponential 'bloating' in the past decade, Hotels have nevertheless fostered some of the most interesting scale explorations, such as those pioneered by the Japanese capsule hotels. As a type which is always foregrounding 'lifestyle' experiments, the Hotel allows to radically rethink basic modes of living while redefining the relationship between public and private within its own walls. The Hotel is also a real place that builds on fiction and fantasy, one that will allow unbridled explorations for the studio.

SITE

Located at Metropolitan Avenue 1, on the booming waterfront of Williamsburg, the studio will experience and explore the transformation of our own 'emerging' neighborhood, and the recent explosion of its hotel and night scene.

PROCESS

While both program and site will be instrumental in the exploration of Scale, the studio will build on a strong dialogue between digital and physical modeling, developing the project through various modes of representations which will oscillate between real propositions and abstract explorations to produce a 3'x3'x3' model – part or whole – of their project, inspired by a long tradition that includes doll Houses, terrariums and SANAA's half scale models.

REFERENCES

Publications

Reyner Banham, "The Great Gizmo" in *A Critic Writes: Essays by Reyner Banham* (University of California Press, 1996), 109-118

Junya Ishigami, *Another Scale of Architecture* (Seigensha, 2011)

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Leonardo's Notebooks, Ed. H. Anna Suh (Black Dog and Leventhal Publishers, 2005), 42

Donna J. Haraway, *When Species Meet* (University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 3-45

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Jorge Otero Paillos, "'Bigness in Context': Some regressive tendencies in Rem Koolhaas' urban theory," in *City*, Vol.4, No. 3 (Taylor & Francis Ltd, 2000)

Felicity D. Scott, *Architecture or Techno-Utopia* (MIT Press, 2010), 151-184

Colin Rowe, *The Mathematics of the Ideal Villa and Other Essays* (MIT Press, 1987), 1-29

Venturi, Scott Brown and Izenhour, *Learning from Las Vegas – Revised Edition: the forgotten Symbolism of Architectural Form* (MIT Press, 1977)

Vitruvius, *The Ten Books of Architecture*, Trans. M.H. Morgan (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1960), 13-16; 72-90; 131-136; 176-180

Online Articles

Lisa Abend, "White elephants on Parade: The Unloved New Castles in Spain," TimeWorld: May 16, 2012
<http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2114888,00.html>

Mayor Bloomberg, adAPT NYC Competition

<http://therealdeal.com/blog/2012/07/09/city-launches-competition-for-micro-apartments/>

Robin Pogrebin, "For Large Museums, Thinking Big Can be Suicidal" in NYTimes: June 27, 2012

<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/28/arts/design/study-shows-expansion-can-be-unhealthy-for-arts-groups.html?pagewanted=all>

Chris Morris, "Spain in Crisis: Broken Visions dot Galicia's Landscape," BBC News Europe: Aug 2, 2012
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/19079285>

PRECEDENTS (See Scale Comparison on Courseworks)

PROGRAM REFERENCES (see Appendix on courseworks)

SITE



SCHEDULE

<p>Week 1 Sep 5, 7 Sep 5: Lottery Presentation Sep 7: Portfolio Review / Precedent selection North by Northwest Screening Start Class Site Model</p> <p>Week 2 Sep 10, 12, 14 Precedents Analysis Sep 12: Readings Discussion / Precedent Analysis Sep 14 PIN-UP 1 – Scale Timeline & Jorge Otero-Pailos Presentation</p> <p>Week 3 Sep 17, 19, 21 Sep 17: Site Visit (late afternoon) Sep 19: Hotel Tours Sep 21: PIN-UP 2 – Site Analysis Class Site Model Complete</p> <p>Week 4 Sep 24, 26, 28 Scale Effects Sep 28: Pin-Up 3 – Scale Effects David Moore Presentation</p> <p>Week 5 Oct 1, 3, 5 Programming Oct 5 PIN-UP 4: Programming Concept</p> <p>Week 6 Oct 8, 10, 12 Programming + Scale Concept, ctnd Massing</p>	<p>Week 7 Oct 15, 17, 19 Massing, Sections & Envelope exploration</p> <p>Week 8 Oct 22, 24, 26 Oct 22: MIDTERM</p> <p>Week 9 Oct 29, 31, Nov 2 Model Development</p> <p>Week 10 Nov 5, 7, 9 Nov 5: Election Day / Class On Model Development</p> <p>Week 11 Nov 12, 14, 16 Model Development PIN-UP 5: Concept & Model Development</p> <p>Week 12 Nov 19, 21, 23 Nov 23: Thanksgiving</p> <p>Week 13 Nov 26, 28, 30 Synthesis & Presentation Strategy</p> <p>Week 14 Dec 3, 5, 7 Dec 5: FINAL REVIEW</p>
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ROOMS

Sep 7 - Avery 115 (4-6pm)
 Sep 12 - Avery 504 (2-6pm)
 Sep 14 - 504 (2-6pm)
 Sep 21 - Ware (2-6pm)
 Sep 28 - Ware (2-6pm)
 Oct 5 - Avery 505 (2-6pm)
 Oct 22/Midterm - Avery 505 (12-6pm)
 Nov 12 - Avery 505 (2-6pm)
 Dec 5/Final - Avery 505 (12-6pm)