

CourseNo: ARCHA4104_002_2013_1

Instructor Information:

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**Extreme Cities: Building Megalopolis
Spring 2013**

**Columbia University
Graduate School of Architecture, Planning, and Preservation
Network Architecture Lab
Instructor: Kazys Varnelis, Ph.D.
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This studio is part of the Extreme Cities collaboration between the Graduate School of Architecture, Planning, and Preservation and Audi AG. Developed out of the Experiments in Motion program, Extreme Cities begins with the observation that cities will intensify considerably during the next fifty years. Instead of the usual mindset seeing the growth of global cities as an overwhelming set of seemingly unmanageable problems, this project sets out to take this intensification to an extreme. In doing so, we will set out to understand both the past and the distant future, with the aim of having students envision unprecedented building types for the year 2063.

The studio's site is the world's first megalopolis, BOSWASH. In his 1961 book *Megalopolis; the Urbanized Northeastern Seaboard of the United States*, geographer Jean Gottmann identified this territory as an unending conurbation of cities, satellites, and suburbs stretching from Boston to Washington D.C., For Gottmann, the megalopolis is "the cradle of a new order in the organization of inhabited spaces," a territory in which any distinction of city and country is gone, but also a territory that is dominantly suburban.^[1] Dubbing the area BOSWASH in his 1967 book *the Year 2000: A Framework for Speculation on the Next Thirty-Three Years*, scenario planner Herman Kahn predicted that the area would reach a population of 80 million by the year 2000, up from 37 million in 1960. Kahn's term stuck but his prediction was mistaken, missing the massive migration of population to the South and West, and a warning sign to us that prediction is a dangerous business. Architecture studio, of course, is dangerous business.

Thus, if BOSWASH is our physical site, the studio's temporal site is in both the past and the future. We aim to go back fifty years into the past, to the era of Gottmann and Kahn as well as fifty years into the future, to an era in which current GSAPP students will reach an age traditionally considered as elderly. Doing so will unsettle our conceptions about architecture and cities, allowing us to think beyond the atemporality of contemporary culture and the limitations of contemporary thought.

Semester Plan

We will begin the semester with a historical research project into the development of BOSWASH.

Our premise is that the fifteen years between 1961 and 1976, traditionally seen as an era of decline were in fact a rich time in terms of thinking about the future of cities and particularly so in BOSWASH, by thinkers, politicians, planners, and architects. In addition to Gottman's work, the research of BOSWASH-based scholars such as Jane Jacobs, Herbert Gans, Kevin Lynch, Venturi-Scott-Brown, Stanley Milgram, William H. Whyte proved critical to establishing new thinking about the city. We start off with a survey of both, producing a timeline of both projects on the megalopolis and dictionary of urban qualities.

For our survey, we will take repeated forays into the nearby areas of BOSWASH, visiting the Empire State Plaza in Albany (one of America's largest megastructures and an attempt to create a link to BOSWASH that is generally considered to have failed), Boston, New Haven, New Jersey, and New York (this list is presently open to change). Our goal is to investigate architectural interventions that reflect specific qualities of the city, engage in the region, and anticipate a future. Each student will examine one project in extreme depth while identifying how these qualities manifest themselves in the city and in architecture.

Collected into timelines, this research will act as the basis for the second half of the studio in which students will extrapolate a new building type.

Simultaneously, students will be collecting information on a single urban quality that is embodied within their project. Students will produce brief videos capturing on this quality within the present day city.

Using this data, students will produce a new architecture typology, projected fifty years into the future that reflects and aids the changing characteristics of the radically intensified megalopolis of 2063.

Course Blog

Students will be expected to maintain and post regularly to a shared course Tumblr blog of their research and design progress. All student work will be posted online tagged by student name (firstname-lastname).

Engineering

Students will work with roving engineers from ARUP during the semester to address the structural and environmental systems in their designs. Even the most speculative of projects can benefit from the advice of these experts.

Representation

Ultra-realistic perspective and Photoshop-based montages are banned in this studio. We propose that this sort of representation is inappropriate, corresponding to what Mark Fischer has dubbed “capitalist realism,” a condition in which we are offered nothing but the present the eagerly wait for the next thrill the system has to offer.^[2] Evacuated of any critical intent, such work only cements the false notion that modern technology has made communication transparent.

But more than that, if all architects produce a form of science fiction, then to paraphrase William Gibson, we need to remember that as we construct futures, all we have at our disposal is the moment that we are currently living in.^[3] The moment we construct a future it starts to age rapidly. Since the crash, along with the development of technologies that were formerly consigned to an endlessly deferred proximate future such as near-universal wireless Internet, locative media, tablet computing, and touchscreen interfaces, it seems that we have exhausted the era of the next new thing, of rapid technological and cultural development and obsolescence.

Thus, envisioning the future through architecture forces us to follow Alex Galloway’s suggestion that “all media is dead media,” to understand that appropriate representational strategies that might resist capitalist realist representations might emerge out of a new understanding of what Gibson calls a “long now,” a temporally stretched condition out of which we can freely recombine material and representational motifs.^[4]

We will look at forms of representation immanent to our topic at hand, from schedules to traffic engineering plans, flowcharts, to exploded axonometrics for vehicle parts. Such diagrams not only offer rich territory to mine for representational strategies, their close study allows us to better understand the topic we are involved in. Precise, unshaded hidden line drawings, plan, section, elevation, and axonometric offer us a carefully and logically articulated system of delineation appropriate for a bus terminal.

Grading:

20% Attendance and Participation

Students are expected to attend studio sessions, be on time, and ready to discuss their work at every session. Students are expected to participate in group discussions, to cooperate with other studio members by offering criticism, advice, and good spirit.

Group meetings, regularly scheduled once per week allow us to share our research and constantly re-tune our method and approach to the material.

Students are expected to be at pin-ups and reviews on time with work ready to present. Students who are not ready at the beginning of the pin-up or review forfeit the right to receive criticism. Students are expected to contribute to pin-ups and reviews, both in terms of criticism and questions as well as by working in a team to ensure that rooms are ready to present in (adequate chairs, projectors, and so on).

40% Concept

Students will be graded on the originality and rigor of their concepts. All students need a coherent thesis in this studio.

Columbia teaches in English. There is help available for difficulties with the English language in the university, but lack of understanding is not an excuse.

40% Execution and Presentation

A good concept means little if it is poorly executed or presented. Presentation and execution are not trivial, nor are they mere “polish,” rather the choices made in presentation and execution should inform, and be informed by, the concept.

Students are expected to render and present their work clearly, succinctly, and elegantly.

Work should be thoroughly and completely represented.

A Brief Bibliography of Books regarding Design and Presentation

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1	0121	M	MLK Day
	0123	W	Lottery
	0125	F	Introduction / Portfolio Review
2	0128	M	Seminar / Portfolio Review
	0130	W	Seminar
	0201	F	
3	0204	M	Site Visit: Albany
	0206	W	
	0208	F	Pin-Up of Research

4	0211	M	Seminar with Mark Shepard
	0213	W	Expose: Peepers, Flashers, and Other Law Breakers, 6.30pm
	0215	F	
5	0218	M	
	0220	W	One-Quarter Review
	0222	F	Seminar on representation with Steve Rowell
6	0225	M	Kazys away
	0227	W	Kazys away / Pin-Up
	0301	F	
7	0304	M	
	0306	W	
	0308	F	
8	0311	M	
	0313	W	Mid-Review Week
	0315	F	
9	0318	M	Spring Break
	0320	W	Spring Break
	0322	F	Spring Break
10	0325	M	
	0327	W	
	0329	F	
11	0401	M	
	0403	W	
	0405	F	Three-Quarter Review
12	0408	M	
	0410	W	
	0412	F	
13	0415	M	
	0417	W	
	0419	F	Pin-Up
14	0422	M	
	0424	W	
	0426	F	
15	0429	M	
	0430	W	Final Review

[1] Jean Gottmann, *Megalopolis the Urbanized Northeastern Seaboard of the United States*, (New York: Twentieth Century Fund, 1961), 9.

[2] Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism. Is There No Alternative*, (Hampshire, UK: Zero Books, 2009).

[3] Scott Thill, "William Gibson Talks *Zero History*, Paranoia and the Awesome Power of Twitter," *Wired Underwire Blog*, posted September 7, 2010, <http://www.wired.com/underwire/2010/09/william-gibson-interview/all/1>.

[4] Alex Galloway, "Cory Arcangel (Beige) and Paper Rad's *The Mario Movie*" (2005) http://www.deitch.com/projects/press_text.php?pressId=29. Michael Parsons, "Interview: Wired Meets William Gibson," *Wired UK* posted October 13, 2010, <http://www.wired.co.uk/news/archive/2010-10/13/william-gibson-interview>.