

FS 2008

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Exercise types: 'P' (for diploma students) or 'e' / 'e+i' (for bachelor-master students)
Group work in Basel and Hong Kong (12 students) **or** Basel and Casablanca (12 students)
Start: Tuesday, 19th February 2008 at 10.00 AM at ETH Studio Basel, Spitalstrasse 8, 4056 Basel

HONG KONG - CASABLANCA



Hong Kong viewed from the Peak, 2007.

STUDIO BASEL – RESEARCH ON INTERNATIONAL CITIES

In contrast to a prevailing view guiding urban research investigations that globalization as a common force impacts the development of cities toward increasing homogenization, sameness, generic characteristics and spaces, Studio Basel starts from a premise that cities equally develop specific traits on the course of their transformation. Since 2004, in its urban research program on international cities, Studio Basel has looked at several such cities, whose recent histories set them apart from general patterns of global urbanization processes. These cities are Hong Kong, Casablanca, Belgrade and Havana, each specifically marked by a turbulent political, economic, cultural and social change: Hong Kong, one of the key economic hubs of Asia is a city currently redefining its role after the 1997 handover to China; Casablanca, the largest North African port is a city where ancient modes of growth through rural migration meet contemporary forces of urbanization and international investments; Belgrade is a post-socialist European city adapting to market economy and democratization after more than a decade of Yugoslav conflict and Havana, the metropolis of the Caribbean, is a city where political and social goals of Cuban revolution are brought to delicate contrast with recent practices of economic liberalization.

The red thread linking this group of cities is their historical position on the borderline of Western European influence, which enabled us to observe the consequences of struggles between globalization, modernization and local traditions and interests. Another theme brought to focus by the research in is the relationship between planned, formal and informal energies of transformation impacting the ways people live, trade or move in a city. This theme too allowed us to investigate and compare similarities and differences among the four cities.

This year, Studio Basel's intention is to complete, present and publish the findings of this long-term research on international cities. After the initial period of work that focused on Switzerland and publication of 'Switzerland – An Urban Portrait' in 2005, the research on international cities will be the second larger body of work to be presented to the public. For this reason, during the summer semester of 2008, Studio Basel proposes to continue and extend investigations started previously and focus again exceptionally on two cities, Hong Kong and Casablanca.

HONG KONG

The formerly British ruled Asian city of Hong Kong, with its extraordinary economical and demographic dynamics, has assumed, after the 1997 handover, a radical change in orientation. The creation of the HKSAR (Hong Kong Special Administrative Region) as a city-state implies a parallel and problematic positioning towards the People's Republic of China. With its profile shifting toward a global finance and service centre, while the production industries move and expand in the Pearl River Delta, Hong Kong still continues to play a specific role at a forefront of this competitive network of cities.

A metaphor describes mentality of Hong Kong as port city, both 'for goods and for people'. Since the 1950s, Hong Kong has experienced unprecedented growth as a gate between China, South East Asia and the rest of the world, helped by a ceaseless stream of incoming population, economic or political migrants from the Mainland. To enable fast-pace city building and house the incoming population squatting every available site required pragmatism, architectural and urbanistic innovation and co-action of public authority with private players.

These powerful forces, together with its special natural conditions of the mountainous terrain with tropical forests and unavailability of building land have shaped Hong Kong as a city of extraordinary beauty and of various urban extremes. It is a city of highest urban density in the world with 6.6 million inhabitants and FAR ranging from 10 to 12. It is a metropolis with a lowest private car ownership in the world, resorting almost exclusively to public transport and still considered a pedestrian friendly city. Architecturally, it is a city of a 'monotype', efficient tower typologies on parking and commercial plinths, parametrically designed.

Ways of living and occupation of the architecture of the high density from towers to megaforms; the artificial relation to topography and to the ground, the urban nature with a sharp boundary toward the city; the large denial of public space at the foot of office and residential high-rises; creation of urban density and development by infrastructure, the roles of public and private actors in the city, the growing importance of history and heritage versus the benefits of commercial development, the links towards Mainland China and the Pearl River Delta, are among the themes central to Studio Basel investigations in Hong Kong since 2004 that will continue during the following semester.



View over the Old Medina of Casablanca, 2005.

CASABLANCA

Similar to Hong Kong, because of its strategic situation on the coast of the Atlantic, Casablanca is one of the oldest 'Global Cities'. From the beginning of the last century, first under the French protectorate and from 1956 onward as Morocco's economic centre, the city experienced an explosive growth, from 25.000 inhabitants in 1907 to 3.7 (official) or even 5 million (unofficial) today. Until the present, Casablanca continues to attract about 300.000 new inhabitants annually, that move into the city from rural hinterlands.

The name Casablanca is surrounded by myths that not necessarily have to do with the actual reality. Today, it is a cosmopolitan metropolis, with only a small historical Medina. While other Moroccan cities such as Fes and Marakesh undergo rapid renewal as tourist destinations and the centre of the monarchy and government resides in Rabat, Casablanca remains Morocco's economic capital, hosting most of country's industries, services and Africa's largest port for goods. The influences of the more liberal economic flows on the city are visibly in a sensitive balance with the traditional values: Casablanca is also a home to the world's largest mosque Hasan II, completed in 1993. The history of the French colonial architecture and urbanism, (studied by Jean-Louis Cohen and Monique Eleb) is fascinating and has in the 1950s and 60s influenced the streams of international modernism. The image of the city of Casablanca today is composed equally by modern architecture, contemporary developments and the informal *bidonvilles*, dispersed throughout the city and along its shifting perimeter.

During the first part of its research on Casablanca in 2005, Studio Basel has investigated and described some of the city's most characteristic urban conditions: for example the Old Medina where contemporary life has infused the ancient structure; mass-housing projects of Nouvelles Médinas as exports of French modernism experimenting with Arabic influences and their spontaneous adaptation to everyday needs; and *bidonvilles*, tolerated settlements on public land that act as sponges for the migration flows. These and other examples and themes looking at the functioning of the city and architectural and urban forms created by different measures of official influence and intricate informal networks spanning all social classes, will continue to be in focus during the summer semester of 2008.

METHOD

The approach to urban research of Studio Basel is phenomenological; it starts from a site, from precise observation and description of 'reality as found'. However this is not a naïve exercise in use of urbanistic tools without a particular goal. We look beyond the obvious and the commonly understood, into processes and situations that often go 'unseen', largely or partially unplanned or created through conflict, negotiation and power plays of many actors in the field. The sites are chosen as symptomatic of active energies of transformation, shaping a city and capturing the present urgencies of the context. The different sites/themes that students address in parallel, come together into a larger picture reflecting the present reality of the city and speculating possibilities for the future. This is why Studio Basel does not make a difference between research and design; the precise, critical view constitutes a political, cultural and social necessity and at least as much potential of intervening into a reality as a design.

SEMESTER ORGANIZATION

For the first time this year, Studio Basel will conduct research in parallel on two cities, extending on the large body of work already done in 2004 and 2005. The research project will begin with larger scale observations in the cities, with intention to make a base in a form of an 'Atlas' of Hong Kong and Casablanca. As the second and the main part of the research program, the students will investigate a series of specific themes and agendas unfolding from chosen locations within the each city. The research will be carried out in groups, usually consisting of two students. The groups will be formed in the beginning of the semester and tasks/cities will be assigned based on interest. A two-week fieldwork journeys to Hong Kong and Casablanca will take place from March 9th till the 24th 2008. **Each student will travel to and work on one city, not both!**

Throughout the semester and during the fieldwork we will collaborate with architecture schools and students from Hong Kong and Casablanca. In Hong Kong, the research will be conducted in collaboration with the Architecture Department of the CHUK (Chinese University of Hong Kong), whose students and teaching staff will be working in parallel on a similar set of issues. In Casablanca too, E.A.C. (Ecole Supérieure d'Architecture de Casablanca) with their staff and students will cooperate on the project. In both cities, we will also come together with experts from fields of architecture, planning and various urban actors and agents through lectures, podiums and city excursions. In Studio Basel, the research takes form of visual narratives with drawings, maps, diagrams, photographs, architectural portraits or anatomies of urban processes that together speculate future potentials for the city and are presented as a book and a slide projection.

The fieldwork is a mandatory part of the course. The costs of travel and accommodation in Hong Kong and Casablanca will not exceed CHF 1500.- per student. Students who are receiving stipends and grants, or who have been exempted from school fees can seek financial assistance by the ETH. (Application forms are available through Mrs. Giordano, HIL E 73.3). The 'official' languages of the project are English for Hong Kong and French for Casablanca. Knowledge of Chinese and Arabic can be very helpful and will be considered as an advantage.

Date	Program	Location	
FEB 19	Start	Basel	Studio Basel introduction to research on cities, HK and CASA
20	Themes	Basel	
26	Studio work	Basel	Introduction to working themes, making of groups
27	Studio work	Basel	
MAR 04	Studio work	Basel	Review of Hong Kong and Casablanca Atlas
05	1 st review	Basel	
09 S	Start of travels: Hong Kong (12 students) and Casablanca (12 students)		
10 M		Hong Kong, Casablanca	
11 T		Hong Kong, Casablanca	
12 W		Hong Kong, Casablanca	
13 T		Hong Kong, Casablanca	
14 F		Hong Kong, Casablanca	
15 S		Hong Kong, Casablanca	
16 S	2 nd review	Hong Kong, Casablanca	Review of fieldwork, talk with local experts
17 M		Hong Kong, Casablanca	
18 T		Hong Kong, Casablanca	
19 W		Hong Kong, Casablanca	
20 T		Hong Kong, Casablanca	
21 F		Hong Kong, Casablanca	
22 S		Hong Kong, Casablanca	
23 S		Hong Kong, Casablanca	
24 M	Arrival from Hong Kong and Casablanca		
25			Easter break
26			Easter break
APR 01	Studio work	Basel	
02	Studio work	Basel	
08	Studio work	Basel	
09	Studio work	Basel	
15	Studio work	Basel	
16	Studio work	Basel	
22	Studio work	Basel	
23	Mid-term	Basel	
29	Studio work		Seminar week
30	Studio work		Seminar week
MAY 06	Studio work	Basel	
07	Studio work	Basel	
13	Studio work	Basel	
14	Studio work	Basel	
20	Studio work	Basel	
21	Studio work	Basel	
27	Studio work	Basel	
28	Final review	Basel	Final review followed by Hong Kong and Casablanca Party