

# Shenzhen : Urban Villages - Releasing the virtuality captured in the Real

2020-21 maig34 studio by Martine de Maeseneer

## Studio programme

The studio Shenzhen 'Urban Villages' will focus on the rapidly changing urban fabric in Shenzhen, the fascinating New Town in the south of China. Shenzhen officially exists only since 1979, is located in the Pearl River Delta opposite Hong Kong and was long considered the factory of the world. The city is rapidly transforming from a factory town to a technology hub that is often dubbed as the next Silicon Valley.

During the timespan of the studio, the participants will focus on the phenomenon of the urban villages that are currently taking new shape in the still growing urban fabric. The traditional urban villages came about through the so-called Hukou system that distinguishes the urban and the rural population. Only the urban population has rights to all services from the city and therefore the rural population created and managed their own resources.

The basic preparation for the Shenzhen Studio was done by a group of international students during the KU Leuven summer school from Sept 7-14, 2019 in collaboration with the Harbin Institute of Technology Shenzhen, the Design Society Shenzhen and Tongji Needs Lab Shenzhen. Last academic year 2019-20 the maib14 Shenzhen studio was already looking into the same programme - their results will also serve as a catalyst and can be seen via :

<http://www.blog-archkuleuven.be/shenzhen-urban-villages/2020/02/06/studio-maib14-shenzhen-2019-martine-de-maeseneer/>

The studio will again be organised in collaboration with Chris Lai, the principal of the Shenzhen based office [www.doffice.nl](http://www.doffice.nl). They will propose a real project site for this 'urban village' investigation.

Above, the Performative Architecture Studio has been focussing for several master dissertation studios on Shenzhen, where also a lot of material can be consulted via <https://academic.mdma.be>.

## The Performative Architecture studio - studio strategy & framework

Since the end of the 19th century, the beginning of the 20th century the idea has gradually grown that forms -no longer- come forth out of a 'mental back-up' which is inherited since immemorial times, which was thought to be vital for us - enabling us to speak, to see and to produce. The scenario that has come in its place is where these 'forms' have fled along our body, into the open space, into thin air.

As a result one can also understand how the western fascination for pure geometry descended over projective geometry to topology, fluidums, networks. In philosophy one calls that the downpour of platonic solids. It's a movement that one can witness, happening in the last century. It's a movement wherefrom generations of modern architects could not escape.

But nevertheless the picture still stands of this carrier space, a canvas, an envelope, a kind of background noise at the very least that works further behind or below the visible and reality. Sui Generi 'diagrams', which is the word which was very much in vogue in the second half of the nineties, work at the same time more autonomous and more generalizing.

For the architect/student it is paramount to chase these forms down, to get grip of them if one wants to know in which direction architecture is moving, as well as on a transpatial or spatial local level.

The studio focused on a continuously search for a broader field of 'patterns', 'motives', 'logos', 'plots' and 'timbres'. — Words with an architectural resonance - which are an expression of a social, cultural and political involvement and expertise at large. This kind of (in)directness works.

This kind of architecture will demonstrate itself to us as it will jump from the classical adagio of likelihood ('to like or not' ...) to an architecture where behaviour stands central ('to behave or not' ...). Think then in the given context about the iteration 'to click or not' ..., whereby texts, words, characters become functions in a sort of digital acrostics: just, avoid to stick them together with images in a glossy picturesque of branding of a city.

## Timing and organisation of the studio

The Shenzhen maig34 studio will run in parallel with the Karachi, Serei Sophon and Buenos Aires studio, 4 hyper transformation cities, and will mostly be organized as joint studios in order to become aware of the different conditions for this 4 locations. Students will need to be prepared to work and meet on Wednesdays on the Ghent campus each week, but on Tuesdays we also will travel regularly to the Brussels campus for collaborative workshops with the other 'hyper transformation city' studios.

The studio places a high emphasis on using drawings and models not as illustrative methods but as design and research tools that test, evolve and resolve ideas in a rigorous manner. The studio demands a very high engagement from each student to challenge their established working methods and to embrace, often unfamiliar ways of working. The study of key theoretical texts, precedents and theories as well as research into cross-disciplinary fields forms the basis for critical reflection and is key for the formation of a coherent theoretical framework and contextualised position. Research will accompany the city project throughout (not just at "the start"). Process driven work and enquiry will form an integral part of the city project. The intellectual decision-making process as well as the investigative design development will be on-going throughout the project.

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