



Babel, from Citizens of No Place (Jimenez Lai, 2012)

Exquisite Corpse: A Whole with Many Parts

Fall 2019 Option Studio
Jimenez Lai + Mark Acciari

This studio examines a large mixed-use architecture— a building that contains multiple worlds within it. By subdividing this large building into parts, we can produce an architecture with character both on the outside and on the inside.

Students are asked to consider design at all scales, “from spoons to cities,” so the saying goes. This range of design demands that the architect has a comprehensive understanding of human culture. Another way of framing this is the notion of “Gesamtkunstwerk,” or “total work of art”— a design ambition in which the architect fully anticipates the choreography of social dynamics within his or her designs. As such, design is not just a creation of hardware (architecture), but also a creation of software (culture).

In this studio, we will establish a part-to-whole understanding of the project. The “whole” being a collection of cities inside of a building, a mixed-use structure we will call a “phalanstery.” The “parts” being prefectures or jurisdictions that should each have their own architectural, economic, and socio-political agendas. Apart, this is a city of cities, but, when recombined together, this city becomes one oversized building with sub-pockets of plural cultures within it. Akin to a surrealist Exquisite Corpse, each individual jurisdiction will take on their own “thesis.”

The site for this studio is Taipei, a city with high density and a housing shortage. Resultantly, people build buildings on top of buildings – and these ad hoc constructions are often illegal and unsafe. We are proposing to formalize this approach by adding buildings onto an existing block in Taipei and studying its implications. A field trip to Taiwan may occur to more closely understand its culture and architecture.

Through the lens of set theory, we will consider how the various superimpositions, differences, mergers, and other mathematical sets impact the architecture spatially, materially, structurally, and programmatically. We are also interested in the subcultures that already exist or will arise out of our intervention on the site in Taiwan. Subcultures, put simply, are groups or factions within a population that society at large view as “not normal” or in some way refuse to adhere to social norms like religion, sexuality, and lifestyle. We want to tell the story of these groups of outsiders through an alternative model for life.

Visiting Critic Jimenez Lai (jimenez.lai@bureau-spectacular.net) will be in Ithaca for four ±4-day visits on the following dates: Aug 30, Sept. 13-16, Oct. 11-14, Oct. 30- Nov. 1, Nov.13-15, and Dec. 6 (or final review) and will also participate in the ±weeklong Field Trip to Taiwan. Visiting Critic Mark Acciari (mark@chibbernoonie.com) will collaborate in the studio on a full time basis in Ithaca. The field trip will take place from September 21–29.

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*\$500 field trip contribution per student is required.