CONFRONTING URBANIZATION
RESEARCH ON
THE (INTER)-ACTIVE TISSUE OF URBAN LIFE

Sam Fox School of Design and Visual Arts, (Research Seminar), Spring Semester 2019, Wed. 8:30-11:30AM, Forsyth 203, Petra Kempf, email: kempf.petra@gmail.com

Moving beyond the separation of material and immaterial spheres, this course will take an innovative and critical approach towards site specific representations of the urban construct—a construct that is no longer understood as an established, fixed and finite entity, but in a state of constant flux.

In recognizing the urban condition as a dynamic process, both visible and invisible in nature, the agency of representing these processes needs to move beyond permanent and territorial driven place (making) relationships. Within this frame of mind we will investigate the urban condition through the lenses of its interactive tissue—a tissue that ranges from smart phones, the world wide web, credit cards, highway systems, airports, sidewalks, to indoor plumbing. This tissue is the multi-scalar as well as operative framework that mediates various flows or stoppages; adapts to changing conditions over time; crosses over; divides; accommodates shortcuts; is able to redistribute, as well as swell and deflate. It resides as a naturalized background as ordinary and unremarkable to us as air. Within this frame of reference, you are invited to investigate, unearth, and document with surgical precision emergent interrelationships between actors, the agency through which actors engage with the interactive tissue as well as how they shape and influence one another.

The recent past has shown a major shift toward viewing the urban construct as a pervasive field of seemingly infinite manipulations and possibilities—a transformation, that the Spanish engineer and planner Ildefons Cerdà coined in 1867 with the term urbanization. Using his General Theory of Urbanization as an entry point; Ludwig Hilbesheimer’s publication Grosstadt Architektur (the architecture of the big city) to bridge over to the most radical expressed idea of infinity by Archizoom also known as No Stop City; to then dive into The City of the Captive Globe illustrated by Rem Koolhaas; arriving at the most recent declaration of urbanization presented by Pierre Bélanger,
who moves the urban condition from states towards systems, the idea of the city as a boundless field of urbanization is a reality we are all confronted with today.

At stake in this debate over urbanization is the question: How does daily life unfold in this limitlessness and complete integration of movement as well as communication—where the collective dimension of life seems to have been relinquished? Who are the game changers in this process of urbanization and who is left out? Is there a limit to this infinity, knowing that things and events have a limit, a form, and an existence?

These broader ideas and definitions of urbanization become the point of departure for this course. You will conduct your research through drawing, both analog and digital. You are encouraged to also apply various software platforms to inform and project ideas about the emergent interactive tissue of the urban construct as well as anchor your work through theoretical materials revolving around the representation and ideas of urbanization.

With the understanding that ideas are generated through speculation, projection and experimentation, we will use the third dimension as a point of departure, towards the fourth dimension of time, and aspire to the fifth dimension of lived experience. It is most welcomed that you bring curiosity to the course, are interested in being investigative, and are open to various mediums ranging from reading theories of urbanization, drawing, experimenting with physical/interactive objects, to projection as a tool to document your research in both analog and digital format.¹

The final product of this course will conclude in a presentation where you will present your research through multiple media outlets, which may range from presenting drawings, installation work or moving images.

ASSIGNMENTS:

Weekly readings: are required to be completed prior to task; you should be prepared to discuss readings with the context of the discussion topic.

Individual: Each of you will read the articles to then construct a minimum of three postcards for each article. In addition, each of you will add one article.

Interim presentation: TBA. & TBD.

Final Presentation: The course will conclude in a presentation where you will present your research through multiple media outlets, which may range from presenting drawings, installation work or moving images.

FORMAT:
The format of this class is based on research—research that you individually and we collectively conduct. You are highly encouraged to participate in the discussion in class. Many weeks will be set up as workshops for direct interaction with the instructor and your colleagues on ongoing research conducted by you. Research will be presented intermittently for group discussion and review. Additional review time can be scheduled during the semester via appointments.

PLEASE NOTE:
This is not a software instruction class, as we will rely on skills and experiences that you have already acquired. It therefore welcomed you bring to the class a great curiosity and interest in analogue and digital representation.

¹ Please note, this is not a software instruction class, as we will rely on skills and experiences that you have already acquired.