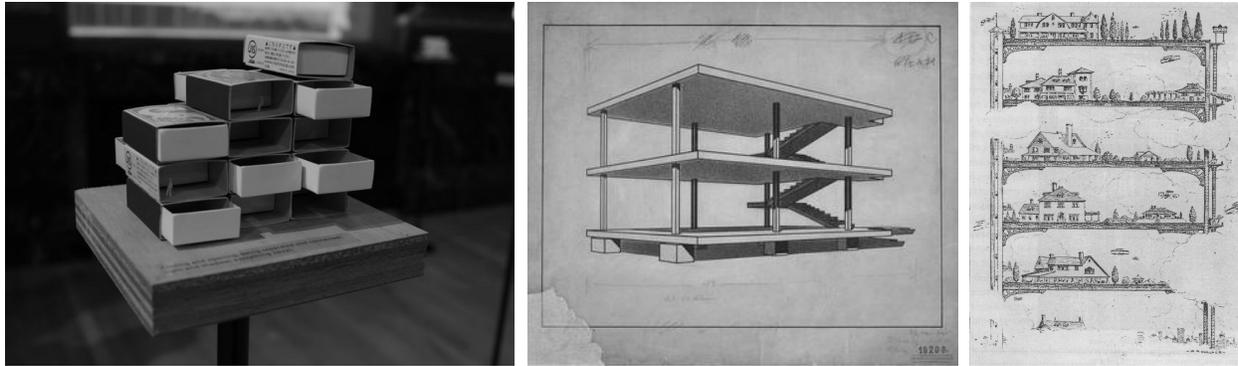


AAD Option Studio
Columbia GSAPP Summer 2018
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Teaching Assistant: Omar Bacho (ob2286@columbia.edu)



Sou Fujimoto, from Architecture is Everywhere, 2015; Le Corbusier, Maison Dom-ino, 1914; Cartoon from Life (October 1909), republished as "1909 Theorem" by Rem Koolhaas, Delirious New York, 1978.

***Stacking, one thing after another, literally, automatically, without too much anxiety...
(The Loft Building Reconsidered)***

Studio Overview

- stack (noun) 1. A pile of objects, typically one that is neatly arranged.*
- stack (verb) 1. Arrange (a number of things) in a pile, typically a neat one.*
- stack (verb) 1.1 Fill or cover (a place or surface) with stacks of things.*

Working with stacks and stacking, this studio will attempt to link three scales of operation—urban systems, disciplinary discourse, and studio technique—to engage a series of interrelated problems in contemporary architecture and urban development. Students will work in teams of two.

The site for the studio is located in West Chelsea, adjacent to the High Line. The program is a mid-rise, mixed-use building of approximately 120,000 s.f., containing a mixture of housing, commercial space, and institutional space, to be determined by each team. In lieu of precisely delineated program, teams will reconsider the loft building and its recent history as both site of gentrification and signifier of new modes of urban life (as well as its role in the early formation of the aesthetics and theories of modern architecture). Teams will work through and question the framing of “neutral,” “flexible,” space through “pure” structure, and, will formulate their own specific program in relation to their architectural strategy, as a means of challenging the current trajectories of “loft” spaces in New York and elsewhere.

In developing the project, teams will critically engage the modern building technologies, programs and urban systems (economic, regulatory, social) that have produced the predominant form of urban building—a stack of flat floors linked by a vertical circulation core, or what Preston Scott Cohen has

recently called, “the unartistically considered, nonhierarchical piling of discrete horizontal slabs of space, one atop the other.”¹ Acknowledging this structural condition of modern architecture—manifest in a number of key theoretical positions, such as Le Corbusier’s “five points” or Rem Koolhaas’s reading of the Downtown Athletic Club—teams will argue for their projects as prototypical urban buildings, questioning whether the material form of the stack itself can today suggest alternative patterns of urban development.

Teams will work to define the form of a project, its spatial organization, and its elevational appearance through a singular structural and material logic (which is not to say a singular structure or material)—the stacking of self-supporting elements. Beginning from a series of physical models, teams will develop sets of objects and rules for stacking them, considering the specific scales and qualities of elements and their relations. Teams should investigate and propose novel material assemblies as means of resolving the structure, services, enclosure, fabrication and construction of a building, as well as the refinement of an architectural syntax and a programmatic and site strategy.

Throughout, the studio will explore contemporary attitudes towards the relationship between physical models, digital software and buildings, in which material qualities and relations are not understood through conventional representational abstractions, but are transposed as directly, or literally, as possible from one media to another. Put in other words, the production of models and images in the studio should engage the desire prevalent in contemporary architecture to always be working on the thing itself—for each instance of a project (physical model, digital file, building) to be at once sufficient in itself as *the* project and consistent in its material expression with each other instance. In this sense, architectural media should also be considered a stack, all literal, none more “real” than the other.

¹ Preston Scott Cohen, “Successive Architecture,” *Log* 32 (Fall 2014)

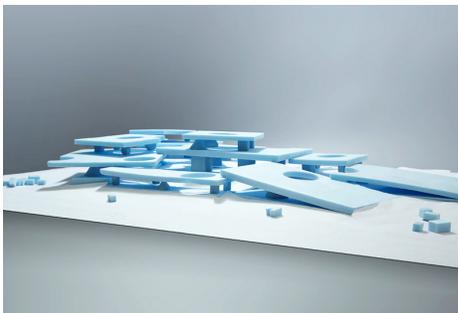
Some Working Taxonomies of Stacking



Frames < *Leutschenbach School, Zurich, 2003-08* < *Christian Kerez* > *House with One Wall, Zurich, 2004-07* > Monoliths



Readymades < *Hemeroscopium House, Madrid, 2008* < *Ensamble* > *Cyclopean House, Brookline, 2015* > Prefab.



Oblique < *Hawai'i Presidential Center, Honolulu, 2014* < *MOS* > *A Foam House, 2017* > Orthogonal



Different < *Silodam, Amsterdam, 1995-2003* < *MVRDV* > *Celosia, Madrid, 2001-09* > Same

Stacking,

Extending and reflecting on Koolhaas' interpretation of Manhattan and its architecture in *Delirious New York*,² as well as Colin Rowe's analysis of the "frame" in the early modern architecture of Chicago,³ Cohen argues that the technologies of 19th century "gridiron urbanization"—steel and reinforced concrete construction, as well as the elevator—have produced the "core" of modern architecture (or, the "technical supports" of the medium of building), with "vertical succession" its "most pervasive governing spatial principle."⁴ This observation suggests a possible reconfiguration of successive architectural propositions—from Le Corbusier's *Maison Dom-ino* and Mies van der Rohe's extruded towers, through the *Unité d'Habitation* and its outgrowths in brutalism and metabolism, to more recent fascinations with the continuous surface and the sectional object—as attempts to grapple with the seeming inevitability that urban buildings are comprised (save for exceptional cases and programs) of a more or less repetitive stack of horizontal levels.

one thing after another,

Whereas earlier disciplinary strategies tended towards attempts to synthesize or overcome the individual expression of stacked spaces in the production of either a singular object or dispersed field, today, one can find entire subgenres of "stacked" buildings (stacks of houses, tubes, trusses, arches) that foreground, through the disaggregation of the building into parts, a discrete set of objects. The nonhierarchical piling of legible things (rocks, blocks, bodies, blobs...) at unusual scales is pervasive, the once predominant subordination of individual parts or modules to the expression of the whole having gradually eroded. Today, there are at least three generations of architects for whom putting one thing on top of another, is a (if, not, *the*) primary strategy of design.

literally,

In many contemporary cases, stacking works at the level of representation or metaphor—the building looks like a stack of things. In the most interesting cases—the stack of vierendeel trusses that structure OMA's 1989 ZKM competition proposal being a defining example—stacking has meaningful structural, spatial and programmatic consequences. In other words, the project does not figuratively express an image of stacking, it works literally through the manipulation of a stack of self-supporting objects. These literal qualities point towards a productive use of physical models, in which the distance between models and buildings is collapsed. Models, like buildings (but unlike drawings or the design spaces of most computational software), are generally composed of discrete solid objects and are governed by gravity. Generations of architects influenced by OMA, Frank Gehry, Herzog & de Meuron, SANAA and others have learned that rough stacks of material can be directly transposed into buildings. In the most exceptional cases, as in Gehry's early domestic projects, or the recent work of Ensemble, one could argue that there is no meaningful material difference between work on the model and work on the building (though this should be distinguished from "cardboard architecture," in which both the model and the building tend towards abstract relations and qualities). Increasingly, this sensibility has also

² Rem Koolhaas, "The Double Life of Utopia: The Skyscraper," in *Delirious New York* (1978, reprinted New York: Monacelli, 1997)

³ Colin Rowe, "The Chicago Frame," in *Mathematics of the Ideal Villa and other Essays* (Cambridge: MIT, 1976)

⁴ Preston Scott Cohen, "The Hidden Core of Architecture," *Harvard Design Magazine* 35 (Fall/Winter 2012); "Successive Architecture," *Log* 32 (Fall 2014)

informed the ways in which particular capacities of computational tools are translated into building form. The impossible abstractions of much of the “paper” and “digital” work of the 1980s-2000s have been largely replaced by accumulations of discrete, legible, materially-specific objects, which appear to effortlessly translate from image to model to building. Video game engines produce projects composed of blocks piled on one another; Adobe Photoshop produces projects composed of image fragments piled on one another. (We might pair Cohen’s fascination with the “inevitable flatness of floors” with something akin to a fascination with the “inevitable flatness of screens”—an interest in treating literally the specific conditions whatever media architecture engages).

automatically,

As Koolhaas and, subsequently, Cohen, argues, the stack of floors is the “automatic” product of large-scale urban systems, operating beyond the authorial will or control of any single architect. Market forces dictate that the plot of land be multiplied maximally in order to extract maximum value from it, while countervailing technological and regulatory limits shape the internal circulation, use and envelope of the building. Today, these given constraints and impulses towards non-composition are joined by a second level of automatic production, with architects developing highly constrained material frameworks for generating form. Reducing technique to the manipulation of specific rule sets—often serial or chance — and sets of objects—often ready-made or generic—becomes a means of further reducing the range of design choices and conceptually “automating” the production of internally ordered structures.

without too much anxiety...

The “ease,” often real, occasionally feigned, with which architects work today allows us to overcome (or ignore) a number of binaries (read: anxieties) that are supposed to have structured recent architectural production: theory and practice, form and program, the analog and the digital, the phenomenal and the conceptual, the *x* and the post-*x*. As, say, Koolhaas’s theories and Gehry’s utter lack of interest in theory reveal, perhaps those categories don’t really matter. One way or another, we are all just putting one thing on top of another.

A Selection of Stacks and the People Who Stack Them (In Progress)



Bruther



First Office



LOT-EK



Pezo von Ellrichshausen



T+E+A+M



Bureau Spectacular



Greg Lynn FORM



MALL



Productora



Christian Kerez



Herzog & de Meuron



MOS



REX



Toyo Ito



Ensamble



Kengo Kuma



MVRDV



SANAA



Valerio Olgiati



*Fake Industries
Architectural Agonism*



Kwong Von Glinow



Office KGDVS



Smiljan Radic



WORKac



formlessfinder



Lacaton & Vassal



Office Kovacs



Sou Fujimoto



Zago Architecture



Frank Gehry



The LADG



OMA



Zeller & Moya

The Loft Building Reconsidered



Studio site, 131 10th Ave., New York, NY 10011; Cory & Cory, with Yasuo Matsui, Starrett-Lehigh Building, New York, 1931.

Program

The urban factory/warehouse and the commercial office building are the earliest manifestations of the building as a nonhierarchical stack of floors. Today, we recognize these buildings as the paradigmatic loft buildings, adopted from their original uses since the 1960s, and particularly since the 1990s. In a familiar rehearsal of the absorption and transformation of once alternative models of living and working into commercial products, the “loft” style is fundamental to today’s real estate offerings and cultural conceptions of urban life. The “open concept” and presumptive flexibility of “loft living,” “creative” offices, and other new brands of urban program cannot be divorced from the pre-existing architectural structures that support them (and the historical re-occupation of Soho, TriBeCa, Chelsea, and other New York neighborhoods, from which their cultural capital derives.) As the architectural structures of these loft buildings have persisted through multiple cycles of re-occupation, this studio will begin not with an enumerated program, but rather an attempt to grapple with a specific legacy of architectural form, and the possibilities of imagining a contemporary trajectory beyond it. Central to the studio is the idea that architecture can exceed any specific program and its duration, and can establish a spatial and structural order that in fact contributes to the invention of new programs long after its initial construction and occupation.

Site

The site is situated on 10th Avenue, bounded by West 18th and 19th Streets and the High Line. The project takes as a starting point the given zoning designation (C6-2) and the various overlays that may affect the site (Special West Chelsea District, Coastal Zone, Flood Zone, etc.). Beyond the broader context of Manhattan, and its exemplary expression of conditions of contemporary urbanism in the United States and elsewhere, this site offers a number of specific trajectories in exploring the problem of the stack:

1) The duplication of the ground and the possibility of accessing the building and occupying outdoor space at multiple levels. If, in the conventional urban building, there is differentiation of the first and last levels of the stack, typically given over to exceptional programs, the studio project is complicated by the presence of a second “ground” on the site, which suggests both programmatic opportunities and architectural consequences.

2) The persistence of loft buildings and the mix of programs that inhabit them in Chelsea today—apartments; galleries; non-profit arts institutions; studio spaces; design, tech. and other “creative class” offices; and, stubbornly, remnants of light-industry and warehousing. Has the stability and spatial flexibility of the loft structure enabled market exploitation in the form of increasingly new and expensive programming of those structures? Can alternative architectural structures induce programmatic alternatives to the rapid transformation of West Chelsea and urban neighborhoods like it?

3) The parallel context of new development—running from Renzo Piano’s Whitney Museum in the south to the Hudson Yards development in the north—the most concentrated grouping of name-brand contemporary architecture in the city, in which Pritzker winners and global firms play out Koolhaas’s parable of the City of the Captive Globe—generally unconvincing attempts to deviate (leaning, folding, stepping, twisting, corseting, etc.) from the commercial model of the extruded stack, punctuated by the occasional privately-owned public space or facility. Freed of the immediate pressures of commercial development, what alternatives to these contemporary strategies for challenging the underlying structure of multi-story buildings is possible?

Schedule

Studio meets Mondays, Wednesdays, Thursdays, May 31-August 3, 2:00pm-6:00pm

Wednesday, May 30, 2:00pm-6:00pm –Studio Lottery
Thursday, May 31, 2:00pm-6:00pm – First Day of Studio
Thursday, June 6, 2:00pm-6:00pm – Field Trip (101 Spring St., New Museum—TBC)
Wednesday, June 13, 2:00pm-6:00pm – Field Trip (Met Breuer, Guggenheim—TBC)
Wednesday, June 20, 2:00pm-6:00pm – Interim Review
Monday, July 2, 9:00am-1:00pm – Midterm
Wednesday, July 4 – No Class (Independence Day Holiday)
Wednesday, July 18, 2:00pm-6:00pm – Interim Review
Thursday, August 2, 9:00am-1:00pm – Final

References (In Progress)

Reyner Banham, “The New Brutalism,” *Architectural Review* (December 1955)
Preston Scott Cohen, “Conversation,” *Project 5* (Spring 2016)
-----, “Successive Architecture,” *Log 32* (Fall 2014)*
-----, “The Hidden Core of Architecture,” *Harvard Design Magazine 35* (Fall/Winter 2012)*
-----, “The inevitable flatness of floors interests me,” *Log 28* (Summer 2013)
Le Corbusier, *Toward a New Architecture* (1923, republished New York: Dover, 1985)
Rem Koolhaas, “The Double Life of Utopia: The Skyscraper,” in *Delirious New York* (1978, reprinted New York: Monacelli, 1997)*
OMA, *S,M,L,XL* (New York: Monacelli, 1995)
-----, *Content* (Cologne: Taschen, 2003)
Marc Linder, “Literal: There’s No Denying It,” *Log 5* (Spring/Summer 2005)*
-----, *Nothing Less Than Literal: Architecture after Minimalism* (Cambridge: MIT, 2004)
Colin Rowe, “The Chicago Frame,” in *Mathematics of the Ideal Villa and Other Essays* (Cambridge: MIT, 1976)*
-----, “Introduction,” in *Five Architects* (New York: Oxford, 1975)
Robert Somol, “Green Dots 101,” *Hunch 11* (2007)

* *Distributed and read during the first week of class.*