

## FAT STUDIO

Columbia University, GSAPP

Advanced Options Studio, Fall 2015

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**Summary:** Beginning with research into architectural “Fat,” the students will develop a theory of Fat to be explored in the design of a convention center in San Francisco. Broader cultural and urban issues will be addressed through several exercises over the course of the semester.

### Architectural Fat

Every architect must have a theory of Fat. The most infamous advocate for the necessity of Fat is Phillip Johnson, who (along with Paul Rudolph) stated that “Architecture is the Art of Wasting Space.” Others have subconsciously internalized their appetite for Fat so that it is barely identifiable in their architectural diet, transforming spatial excesses into essential ingredients of their organizational or spatial languages. Obvious examples include Tschumi’s concept of the “inbetween,” which amplifies circulation; Gehry’s lean programmatic boxes, which allow for voluptuous silky silhouettes; Koolhaas’s methodical articulation of program to render out its formal richness; or Sejima’s marbling of program and circulation, making the two inseparable. In each case, the architect’s ability to manipulate the understanding of efficiency and excess cannot be underestimated as essential to the architectural expression. This studio will examine the dialectic between excess and efficiency intrinsic to architectural Fat. A definition of Fat will emerge through the analysis of specific buildings, architects, and cities. In so doing, the spatial, programmatic, technological, structural, and economic effects of Fat will be articulated through a series of analytical diagrams and drawings.

### Fat Is Not Big

*“Not only is BIGNESS incapable of establishing relationships with the classical city—at most, it coexists—but in the quantity and complexity of the facilities it offers, it is itself urban. BIGNESS no longer needs the city: it competes with the city; it pre-empts the city, or better still, it is the city. If urbanism generated potential and architecture exploits it, BIGNESS enlists the generosity of urbanism against the meanness of architecture. BIGNESS = urbanism vs. architecture.” —Rem Koolhaas*

Unlike Koolhaas’s notion of Bigness, Fatness is not in an adversarial relationship with the city or context. While Bigness accepts the impotence of architecture in the face of urbanism and the infrastructural city, this studio will seek to determine how Fatness can reestablish architecture’s relevance in an urban context through new strategies of scale, efficiency, program, form and structure. We will investigate how Fat, as an architectural necessity, can help overcome architecture’s indifference to urbanism and context.

Thoughts on Fat:

1. Fat is about productive excess, Bigness is about scale.
2. Fat engages with the City, Bigness competes with the city.
3. Fat can be Planar or Sectional.
4. Fat is Urban *with* Architecture, Bigness is Urban *against* Architecture.
5. Fat is dependent on context, Bigness is independent of context.
6. Fat is formal, Bigness is formless.

## **CONTEXT:**

### **San Francisco Tech Boom**

The most recent tech surge in the Bay Area is shifting the center of the bubble from Silicon Valley to the heart of San Francisco's blighted Tenderloin and Mid-Market areas. In 2011, San Francisco implemented the "Twitter Tax Break," which incentivized Twitter's relocation to Mid-Market and drew tech firms from Silicon Valley in a bid to revitalize the area. This incentive, which has drawn companies like Airbnb, Uber, Dolby, and Spotify to the City's once blighted urban center, is now significantly transforming the population of the area with an influx of tech and is subsequently bringing the large homeless population in the area to the forefront of civic debate. As these companies take root in the city, the traditional narratives of gentrification are exacerbated by the ethos of Silicon Valley tech culture, which promotes proto-urban values (density, serendipity, indeterminacy, etc.) within self-contained mega-offices (eg. Facebook HQ, Googleplex).

What are the forces that are driving these mega-interior projects? How is the Silicon Valley form of Bigness different from previous forms of Bigness? What role does architecture have in directing these forces as they migrate back to the city from the suburbs? Could Fatness constitute an alternative attitude toward scale that would recapture architecture's agency in the city?

## **PROGRAM:**

### **Convention Center – Cities with(in) Cities**

*"A convention center is not in itself a vitalizing force...It is, essentially, an enormous box, often of heavy concrete, stretching for hundreds of feet and many blocks, offering blank vistas of endless solid walls. It lays a dead hand on everything around it. It breeds empty streets, except at show or meeting time, when it bring streams of traffic..."—Ada Louise Huxtable*

A convention center is an inherently "big" typology—a temporary city within a city defined by a large, often homogenous influx of visitors for short durations of time. The convention center often exists in parallel to the host city, capitalizing on the urban backdrop while simultaneously maintaining indifference to it. The organizers of Dreamforce, a four day convention of "thought leaders" at the Moscone Convention Center, will dock a cruise ship in the bay to accommodate thousands of visitors. This novel solution highlights the scale of transformation the city undergoes during an event like Dreamforce. By investigating the inherent conflicts and disjunctions between the traditional city and the temporary urbanism of the convention center, the studio will generate new propositions for The Moscone Convention Center in San Francisco, challenging notions of temporality, scale, program, interiority, exchange, collectivity, etc.

### **Hospitality and Neo-cosmopolitanism**

In addition to the migration of the tech companies, San Francisco's Mid-Market area is rapidly developing into a hospitality hub to accommodate increased flows of visitors generated by new developments. Over the next few years The Standard, Yo-tel, Renoir, and others will all be completed in a six block area. The studio will produce speculative concepts of hospitality in relation to the convention center. By challenging the contemporary notions of jet-set culture and mobility, hospitality will be investigated as a neo-cosmopolitan space questioning relationships between depth and surface, multiplicity and singularity, difference and sameness, global and local, community and capitalism, collectivity and individuality.

Implicit in the design of a Convention Center must be an argument about architectural Fat,

both at the building scale and the city scale. The project will reconsider the Convention Center as a mixed-use facility with advantageous programmatic mixing (i.e., cultural-hospitality-infrastructural rather than purely cultural or infrastructural). Further, the project demands an anthropological/sociological argument with regard to how architecture addresses the Neo-cosmopolitan and Technology/Virtual Communities' intersections with architecture.

## **DESIGN PROCESS:**

Students will work individually for initial research and Project 1. In Project 2, they will work in pairs and can choose to remain in pairs or work individually for the remainder of the studio. Dominic and Chris will co-teach studio along with a Teaching Assistant.

### **1. Fat Research (3 weeks) - Individual**

Deliverables:

Diagrams

- Plan
- Section
- Axo
- Detail
- Conceptual Drawing
- Model

### **2. Urban and Cultural Strategies (3 weeks) – Pairs**

Deliverables: TBD

Collective Site Model

### **3. Architectural Proposals (8 Weeks) - Pairs or Individual**

Deliverables Pin-up – TBD

Deliverables, Mid-Review - TBD

Deliverables, Final Review - TBD

## **SCHEDULE:**

9/11	Fri	First Studio - 2pm, Location TBD
9/24	Thur	Pin-up, Fat Research
10/19	Mon	Pin-up, Site Research
11/9	Mon	Mid-Review
11/23	Mon	Three Quarter Review
12/10	Thur	Silent Pin-up
12/16	Wed	Final Review

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**FILMS:**

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