

**Title: *SUPERUS***

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## **Abstract**

SUPERUS is a contemporary urban design discourse exploring cities in this instance Tokyo and Hong Kong as the fertile ground in exploring themes developed out of the continuing project work of UCLan/ VTC architectural studies programme.

The 6 themes of SuperTYPE SuperBOUND, SuperIMPOSE, SuperFLOW, SuperOCCUPY & SuperFORM emerged from two varying urban territories of Hong Kong & Tokyo. Field study work by transnational students was carried out alongside workshops over a period of 10 days in Tokyo and Hong Kong, observing, cataloguing, abstracting and analysing photographic narratives. The activities connected Hong Kong students with UK students in Tokyo to conduct multidisciplinary field studies in observation & research.

The 6 themed Typologies that emerged from this work can be seen as conditions in a field of inquiry, captured through narrative instruments such as photographs and discussed to show certain formal similarities in the constructed urban context that we call here the terroir of the (un) obvious city. The comparative analysis of the work posits a new framework in understanding the new terroir of global cities as a methodological approach grounded in the everyday experiences within the global city. It is a theoretical model that captures the identification of new typologies, as an emergent paradigm.

Student experiences were drawn upon and into their lived experiences. In such a process it was necessary to unpack the identities and easily identifiable typologies of the global city as a counter point to the unobvious and life of transient visitors and permanent residents. They omitted colour, scale and orientation to elucidate notions of form & shape; boundary & connection; type & category; flow & movement; occupation & authorship; together with impositions & interventions.

Once typologies and identities emerged from within the work, specific and pervasive phenomena were caught in a formal language about the global cities. It could be argued to be representative of a lived and real narrative of such global cities. Superus as an architectural artefact and ongoing urban discourse is revealed within the photo essay a valuable new theoretical and methodological approach to reframing existing paradigms connected with identity and global cities.

Superus

## CONTEXT

SUPERUS as a contemporary urban design discourse explores the city in this instance Tokyo and Hong Kong as a fertile ground and rich seam in exploring 6 key themes developed out of the continuing project work of UCLan/ VTC architectural studies programme.

The 6 themes of 'SuperTYPE', 'SuperBOUND', 'SuperIMPOSE', 'SuperFLOW', 'SuperOccupy', and 'SuperFORM' emerged from the backdrop of two varying urban territories of Hong Kong and Tokyo.

Field study work by a transnational student cohort was carried out alongside workshops in Tokyo over a period of 6 days, observing & recording, cataloguing, abstracting and analysing photographic narratives. An additional 4 workshop days in Hong Kong collated and comparatively analysed similar field study work in Hong Kong.

The activities connected Hong Kong students with UK students in Tokyo to conduct multidisciplinary field study observation and research. Students covered such locations in Tokyo as: Chiyoda-ku, Minato-ku, Naka-ku, Hachioji, Shibuya, Sumida-ku, and Setagaya-ku. And Locations in Hong Kong such as: Sha Tin, Tsing Yi, Central, Kowloon, Tsim Sha Tsui, and Kwun Tong

The 6 themed Typologies that emerged from this work form conditions in a field of inquiry, captured through narrative instruments such as photographs and discussed to show a certain formal similarity in the constructed urban context, the new urban terroir. The comparative analysis of the work posits a new framework in understanding the new terroir of global cities PROCESS.

The itinerary programme of building visits in Tokyo and Hong Kong included:

Day 1 Arriving in the evening we examined the inventive construction of Tokyo International Forum by Rafael Vinoly in Marunouchi, Chiyoda-ku.

Day 2 Our morning visit included Tepia in Kitaayama and Spiral in Minami-Aoyama both situated in the Minato-ku area by Fumihiko Maki. During the afternoon we walked along fashion houses e.g. Prada, Herzog de Meuron to visit the Nezu Museum by Kengo Kuma in Minami-Aoyama, Minato-ku.

Day 3 Included visiting Osanbashi Yokohama International Passenger Terminal by Foreign located in Kaigandori, Naka-ku a suburb in the south of Tokyo

Day 4 Travelling by bus and train on quite a lengthy journey we finally arrived at Tama Art University Museum by Toyo Ito in Yarimizu, Hachioji. Unfortunately, however due to the forthcoming 2020 Olympic preparations Yoyogi National Gymnasium, Kenzo Tange, the New Olympic Stadium, Kengo Kuma and Tokyo Metropolitan Gymnasium, Fumihiko Maki were inaccessible to the public. Students were taken alternatively to the Meiji shrine, park and temples followed by a shopping expedition in Shibuya the throbbing intersection made famous by its huge mass of pedestrians at the crossroads.

Day 5 The visit began with SANAA's, a recently completed building in 2017 housing the great Hokusai print collection. In contrast to this we walked down the road to completed in 1993 by Kiyonori Kikutake. The afternoon visit led us through the housing suburbs to Kengo Kuma's Food and Agriculture Museum in Kamiyoga, Setagaya-ku.

Day 6 The UK group had an early flight back to Hong Kong and were staying in VTC accommodation on Tsing Yi island. Students began by photographing the immediate area towards Lai King in the New Territories.

Day 7 Students began with an orientation exercise exploring the Cultural Centre, Clock Tower, Victoria Harbour, Tsim Sha Tsui, Kowloon and then travelled on the famous Star Ferry to Hong Kong Island and walked through the labyrinthine streets of Central and Exchange Square, The Forum, Aedas slowly rising through the Mid-Levels and Soho via escalators to the trams reaching Peak Tower, Terry Farrell. The afternoon included a visit to Tai Kwun Centre for Heritage & Arts, converted from a prison complex.

Day 8 Hong Kong students returned to their design studio studies at VTC and the UK students began cataloguing and abstracting gathered images before a presentation from the Snohetta architectural practice based in Hong Kong.

Day 9 UK students visited the Big Buddha, Lantau Island to compare the landscape and dense cityscape planning in Mong Kok, Kowloon. Jockey Club, Zaha Hadid

Day 10 Students visited the Bank of China, I M Pei, HSBC, Bank Headquarters, Sir Norman Foster in Central. The evening visit continued with International Commerce Centre, Kohn Pederson Fox, Hong Kong's tallest building and the Xiqu Centre for Chinese Opera, Revery Architecture in West Kowloon

Day 11 UK visit to XCS studio practice in Sheung Wan and visit to Kwung Tong old industrial district. Joint review of trip and travel back to the UK

## DISCUSSION

### The Background Historical Perspectives of Tokyo and Hong Kong

If materials represent a language paradigm then western architecture and Japanese architecture appear incomparable until the mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century. Authority in Japan was at times influenced by Chinese thinking in terms of language and architecture.

The Japanese re-construct not only because they have experienced the devastating effects of earthquakes and bombing but as a way of moving on possibly due to a fear or to erase a collective memory they have an abiding tendency to create a culture with an urge to live in a future time frame. Traditionally a palace was moved and rebuilt upon the death of an emperor that could be attributed to the desire to avoid illness and fear, a reoccurring phenomenon or a type of Chinese Feng Shui. 'To rule was to build, and to build was to rule' (1: pp. 4) so that the omnipotent power lies in the action, ability and authority to build. The 'gateway of power' *Kenmon* and *heika* had been derived from Chinese usage for the expression of authority rather than the Japanese *Mikado* 'honourable gateway' (1: pp. 2)

The Shinto belief in cleanliness and the abandonment of a palace headquarters upon the death of a ruler was to avoid 'defilement' and create a new purified palace a pure clean image of the building to preserve the sanctity of the site for the gods (1: pp. 38) The practice could be innate within the cultural motivation towards the compulsion to rebuild the city. The act of building was experienced in a transformative process and 'religious ritual' to create a purified seat of authority.

Likewise, 'Coming of Age' is an emblem of that the 'new beginning' Japan seems to want to locate itself in the future whereas western culture tends to imbed itself in the past. Historical buildings seem ever present and the ability to maintain the preservation of objects forms part of a false perception of security. The value of which is politically driven in the monumental. Aspirations to 'High Civilisation' are universal and Japan has been forced to reconcile 'impermanence' and 'monumentality' (1: pp. 17) Permanence and monumentality in the architectural expression of authority in Japan has been partially an imported one. 'Derrida recognises when he cautions that 'one cannot speak directly about justice,' it is as Lyotard comments, 'the obligation hanging in mid-air.' (3: pp. 60)

Nations use architecture as a 'power-projection' (1: pp. viii) but Japan's symbols of power have historically been contained in less permanent wooden structures. The power resided in the cultural symbolism held within them so could be mistaken as inferior by westerners. Definitions of 'elite architecture' (1: pp. 11) do not generally include impermanent structures so inherent value becomes blurred as western architectural styles are imported into the East and found in the work of Tatsumo Kingo, student of Josiah Conder, father of Japanese modern architecture. Laws and governments can be influential but 'great architecture makes us believe what we would not have otherwise believed' J. Ruskin (1: pp. 2)

The subtleties could be lost on the transient western 'eye.' The focus is on the heritage of making rather than the identity of the original object. Value systems are different in Japan where e.g. a storehouse or residence is elevated to the religious level. The Edo Tokyo Museum was modelled on a Japanese rice storehouse in Sumida-ku. Notions of reproduction enable modifications rather than imitation. Regarding 'mythologies' Roland Barthes thought that 'decoding myth one can strip it of its power.' (2: pp. 30)

The explanation of Japan's desire to embrace innovation through building has been to overcome the environmental challenges and not to fear the possible failure of the construction but see the demise as an inevitable consequence of time. Destruction is not fully documented in the museums with an equal focus but diminished in terms of its impact. Inventions are distorted and expanded in the time frame. There is an undeclared consensus to omit events and one can discern a palpable void, so that Japan must re-write its own history at an alarming rate.

The cultural focus was on the person or building rather than the religion. In-fact 'pharaoh' meaning 'great house' suggests the symbolic interchangeability of structural identity (1: pp. 7) The National Diet building in Tokyo is in fact the parliamentary building suggesting the anthropomorphic referencing of public consumption and the act of building in Japan could be construed as a religious act.

Identity appears to be ephemeral in modern day Tokyo as many buildings in the west are situated in a historical context, whereas Tokyo embraces contemporary design because it situates itself in the future. As a contemporary city Tokyo seems to be perpetually constructing a new identity rather than reproducing its old style. The quality of construction methods is from an inherent past but the configuration attempts to pose a fresh architectural idea.

Hong Kong skilfully reproduces ancient buildings and respectfully includes symbolic references in traditional decorative styles. The symbolic is in the decoration in Hong Kong but the symbolic is in the materials and arrangement in Tokyo. Both methods however illustrate that 'architecture is essential to the projection of authority' (1: pp. 3)

Another difference appears in the public/private spaces. Tokyo residents have a very defined notion of contained private space, so as not to encroach on adjoining properties. Noticeably the Hong Kong population tend to have a more flexible attitude to overlapping communal spaces particularly visible in the Walled Villages of the New Territories perhaps because the inhabitants are related in a closed community. The kernel of the 'inner sanctum' is held in layers that could be gendered (1: pp. 29) The formal plan that is repeated in the Walled Villages of the New Territories can no longer be found in Kowloon or Hong Kong Island where the compact separation and mix of structures has created an intensely dense urban fabric with a myriad of building typologies. Students experienced the fabric of the cities through the liminal spaces connecting the building visits and extracted the essence of the places along with the buildings as objects for enquiry.

Emergent SUPERUS themes and typologies: SuperForm. Easily and repetitive formal shapes made from the city either unique to each city or applicable across the two. Forms that are contingent and supported by their context

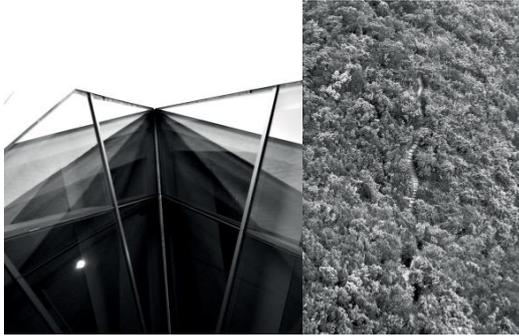


Fig. 1 H. Young

Fig. 2 H. Young

1. On Axis
2. Off Axis

SuperType, typological forms in totality and separate/distinct from their context (immutable mobiles)



Fig. 3 L. Janvier Fig. 4 L. Janvier

1. Stack
2. Interlace
3. Arc
4. Puncture
5. Repeat/recede

SuperBound. Boundaries and liminal States between different types and forms (the space between)



Fig. 5 and 6 H. Young 1. Layered 2. Creased/folded

SuperImpose. Impositions into the boundary as typological /formal or not fully formed interventions in the foreground (people objects artefacts etc)

1. Into imposition
2. Onto stacked imposition

SuperFlow. Impositions or types in a state of flux and movement or emergent from a or existing condition. The process of emergent things from a context



Fig. 7 L. Janvier Fig 8. H. Young

1. On the surface
2. Of the surface

SuperOccupy. The traces and evidence of past emergent things in the context of typologies and or forms that create a dialogue or counter point to the new and emergent identity of a global city



Fig. 9 - 11 H. Young 1. Traced over 2. Emerged into 3. Set Behind

## CONCLUSION

A building in Japan may have a short life span to be reborn again as a new creation so that many unique individual forms exist yet referencing the past in roofs, walls and materiality. Technology also has been a driving force in its emergent narrative. Tokyo seems to hover in a perpetual state of impermanence providing an evolutionary process that is recognisably a constant source for architects to witness in their own lifetime. The texture of the city has a chameleon like nature and Tokyo is Japan's teenager who certainly tries on many clothes to avoid a disaster.

Hong Kong consists of multiples of skyscrapers that operate like shoots in the growth of the city some with incredibly short lifespans and all totally dependent on the fortunes of their occupants. Uniqueness in the contemporary structures serves to operate as a statement of wealth rather than a desire to reinvent a cultural identity as in Japan. Hong Kong has much of its history intact and a strong sense of identity. It celebrates teamwork and clusters of identical skyscraper buildings huddle together like a giant family. Lewis Mumford once commented that 'the city fosters art and is art, the city creates the theatre and is the theatre.' (4: pp. 211)

The fate of the two cities depends on land values and populations. Tokyo has an area of 844.7 sq. miles with 149 skyscrapers, yet Hong Kong has an area of 427.8 sq. miles so is roughly half the size but has over twice as many skyscrapers totalling 353. Building construction methods of high rise are more universally standard whereas low rise buildings offer the opportunity to experiment with different typologies and materials. Bourdieu recognised that 'symbolic capital' within a work, including architecture is 'only for someone who possesses the cultural competence, that is the code...The 'eye,' this 'divides its audience into those who do and do not understand it.' (2: pp. 36-37) Perhaps it is the ambition of the SUPERUS project to continue to examine that statement and include everyone in the debate in an attempt to read the city.

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## Notes

Fig. 1 Japan, fig. 2 Hong Kong, fig. 3 Japan, fig. 4 Japan, fig. 5 Japan, fig. 6 Japan, fig. 7 Japan  
fig. 8 Hong Kong, fig. 9 Hong Kong, fig. 10 Hong Kong, fig. 11 Hong Kong