

City Buildings / Building Cities

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The composite building is an island enclave of communities with specific geopolitical patterns where interrelationships are produced by individual and collective resistances against urban development, the city within and beyond its borders – the building footprint. Many of the inhabitants are outsiders in the city of Hong Kong but citizens in their own building. They search their native languages, cuisines, commodities and employment, which affirm their identities as citizens of a place. These are often young immigrants, refugees awaiting placement, merchants from developing countries, low-wage laborers, and others who do not readily conform to the mainstream. The composite building as island enclave is the site where the other is socialized to one day be a Hong Konger.

From the mid-1950s through the 1970s, a particular collective housing typology classified as the “composite building” was being built that was synonymous to the intensive post-war urban development in Hong Kong. A specific term within the building regulations, “composite” refers to multiple functional uses – always inclusive of the residential – within a single building complex. In the first decade after the enactment of the 1962 Ordinance, over 1,500 composite buildings were built in Hong Kong. Found in the oldest parts in the city and located on a major thoroughfare, most of them remain standing today. Of these, at least 20 contain populations the size of a town. The largest and most populous, 1046 King’s Road in Quarry Bay contains 2,443 units with almost 10,000 inhabitants, excluding unregistered tenants and illegal squatters.

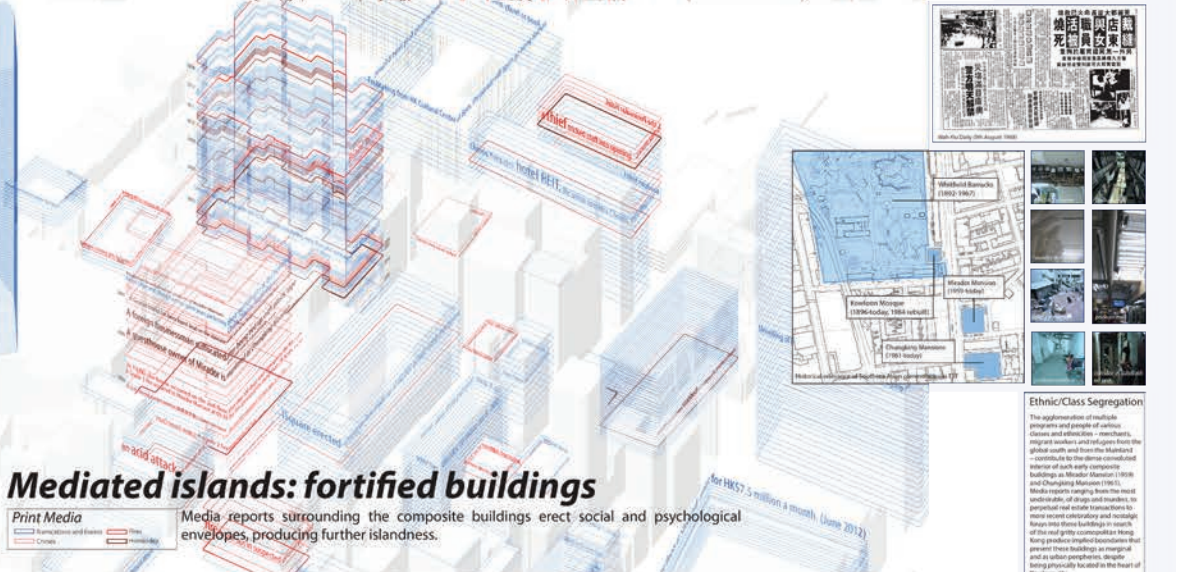
Emerging amidst the economic, social and political exigencies of Hong Kong when the colony was experiencing a massive influx of immigrants as a consequence of the 1949 Revolution in the Mainland, the high-rise composite building exemplifies the paradox of the collective sociability within an individual privatized space. Intended as a co-operative building in which every tenant would own his shop or apartment it is an agglomeration of shops, factories, temples, clinics, crèches and flats, etc. The architecture and organization manifest the way its developers, architects and builders projected the notions of a consumerist society. Now standing stoically amidst a landscape unambiguously defined by density and money, the composite building appears to have momentarily side-stepped urban renewal, as the numerous ownerships and tenant subdivisions pose a daunting challenge for developers and the government to claim the site as a single legal entity. As a space of regional and global exchange, it presents a crucial point of entry for the rethinking of the current state of collective housing in the context of redevelopment and preservation.

What if the composite building – the utopian megastructure envisioned by the architects of the 20th century is allowed to realize its fullest architectural potential of a city in a building? What if dwelling and the city is consummated in the most integrated ways possible? Subsumed by the city’s rapid densification and market-driven development, it seems the logical commercialization or natural development of the composite building is towards increased privatization and segregation.



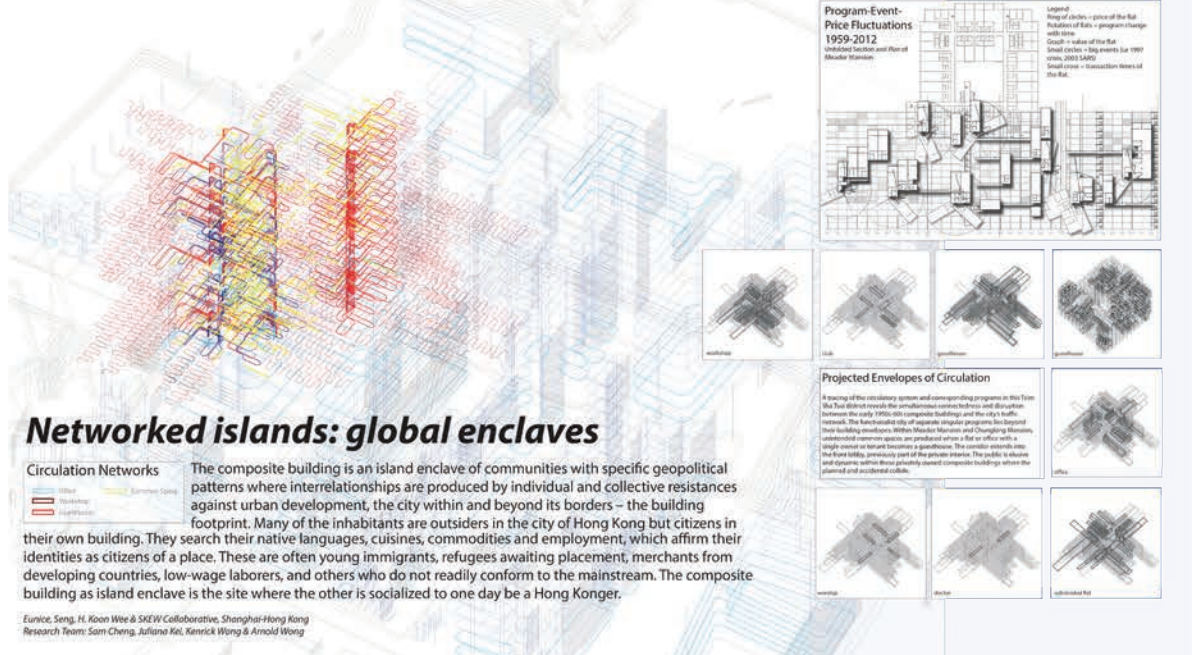
Volumetric islands: ghost buildings

Maximum Envelope What if the composite building – the utopian megastructure envisioned by the architects of the 20th century and grounded in Hong Kong by developers in the latter half of the 20th century – is allowed to realize its fullest architectural potential of a city in a building?



Mediated islands: fortified buildings

Print Media Media reports surrounding the composite buildings erect social and psychological envelopes, producing further islandness.



Networked islands: global enclaves

Circulation Networks The composite building is an island enclave of communities with specific geopolitical patterns where interrelationships are produced by individual and collective resistances against urban development, the city within and beyond its borders – the building footprint. Many of the inhabitants are outsiders in the city of Hong Kong but citizens in their own building. They search their native languages, cuisines, commodities and employment, which affirm their identities as citizens of a place. These are often young immigrants, refugees awaiting placement, merchants from developing countries, low-wage laborers, and others who do not readily conform to the mainstream. The composite building as island enclave is the site where the other is socialized to one day be a Hong Konger.

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