How can we address the rising social and spatial inequality produced by an ever-growing planetary urbanization? On the occasion of a major exhibition at The Museum of Modern Art, this publication brings together three approaches to this crucial issue: critical essays by key authors in urban thinking today, including David Harvey, Saskia Sassen, and Ricky Burdett; highlights from an ongoing participatory survey on tactical urbanisms around the globe; and new design scenarios for the future of six world megacities—Hong Kong, Istanbul, Lagos, Mumbai, New York, and Rio de Janeiro.


Uneven Growth: Tactical Urbanisms for Expanding Megacities

is edited by Pedro Gadanho, Curator, with Phoebe Springstubb, Curatorial Assistant, Department of Architecture and Design, The Museum of Modern Art.

With essays by Pedro Gadanho, David Harvey, Ricky Burdett, Saskia Sassen, Teddy Cruz, and Nader Tehrani.

With design scenarios by international collaboratives especially brought together for the project:

Hong Kong: MAP Office, Hong Kong, and Network Architecture Lab, Columbia University, New York

Istanbul: Superpool, Istanbul, and Atelier d’Architecture Autogérée, Paris

Lagos: NLÉ, Lagos and Amsterdam, and Zoohaus/Inteligencias Colectivas, Madrid

Mumbai: URBZ: user-generated cities, Mumbai, and Ensemble Studio/MIT-POPlab, Madrid and Cambridge

New York: SITU Studio, New York, and Cohabitation Strategies (CohStra), Rotterdam and New York

Rio de Janeiro: RUA Arquitetos, Rio de Janeiro, and MAS Urban Design, ETH Zurich

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The Museum of Modern Art is a laboratory: in its experiments the public is invited to participate.
—Alfred H. Barr, Jr., in Art in Our Time, 1939

From its founding, the Department of Architecture and Design has been associated not only with recording the changing face of architecture and the expanded capacity of the architectural profession, but also advocating for change. In the inaugural show, which coined the term “International Style,” Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Philip Johnson, along with Alfred Barr, set out to direct American architecture, not the least in a section developed by Lewis Mumford on the housing crisis of the early years of the Great Depression. In the late 1960s and 1970s again the museum experimented overtly with the laboratory metaphor, notably in 1967 inviting a set of university-led teams of architects to consider urban solutions that could be alternatives to the then reigning doctrine of urban renewal. Four areas of Manhattan and the nearby Bronx were chosen as test cases for working with existing fabric rather than wholesale bulldozing to provide a new way of looking, making, and thinking about the city, the results displayed in 1967 as The New City.

Initiated in 2009, the Issues in Contemporary Architecture series aims to revive that lapsed legacy, and to find again innovative ways for a museum to engage with some of the most pressing issues facing society today. The goal is to make manifest that the design professions have much to offer at the first stages of framing issues rather than only late in the game once other modes of thinking and planning have worked through a set of problems. In contrast with the more normative demeanor of exhibiting architectural practice, this is an activist curatorial mode, one that complements what I have elsewhere labeled the reactive mode of exhibition. In such a mode, rather than waiting for others to take the lead, the museum instigates and takes risks, setting problems that the status quo or the marketplace do not formulate, committing to showing experimental results that do not yet exist. Rising Currents: Projects for New York’s Waterfront was the first workshop/exhibition in that laboratory series, of which Uneven Growth, presented here, is now the third iteration.

With Rising Currents, the museum served in an all but unprecedented way as the incubator rather than the mirror of new ideas. These ideas were intended not only for instigating a debate on New York City’s relationship to the sea level rise—something made potently evident almost two years to the day after the show’s closing when Superstorm Sandy struck the region—but also to provide ideas and images that might help activate the debate for the millions and millions of people worldwide living in floodable zones. Rising Currents was the result of a three-month-long workshop held at a studio space at MoMA PS1, in which teams assembled for interdisciplinary collaborations alternating long hours of teamwork with critiques by invited experts in a range of disciplines from hydraulics to public transportation.

Two years later, in Foreclosed: Rehousing the American Dream (2012), the same approach was staged to address the challenges of the urban fringe of five American cities hard hit by the subprime mortgage crisis and the tsunami of foreclosures that came in its wake. Again interdisciplinary teams were tasked with thinking about an urbanization of older suburbs that might ameliorate specific places and reopen the debate on the place of housing and transportation in the privatized development economy of the United States. Borrowing a line from Chicago mayor Rahm Emmanuel, then White House chief of staff, it was important for the design culture of the museum never to let a good crisis go to waste.

For the third edition in the series, Pedro Gadanho has turned to a crisis every bit as global, threatening, and daunting as rising sea levels, namely accelerated income discrepancy, a polarization of wealth and poverty that can be read in various ways in our rapidly urbanizing planet. By now everyone knows that a threshold was reached a few years ago when the UN reported than for the first time in recorded history more than half the
world’s population lives in cities. By the mid-twenty-first century, a more recent UN report suggests, the urban population will swell to 67 percent of the world’s population. As a recent report in The Economist notes, that means that “for the next 38 years the world’s cities will expand by the equivalent of six São Paulos every year.” The last forty years too have seen a dramatic increase in what have come to be called the “informal city,” a term intended to replace “slum clearance,” with a value-laden framing of reference. In the face of this, inaction is not an option. With estimates that by 2030 some two billion people, or nearly a quarter of humanity, will be living in illegal dwellings, the tactics for confronting the rising tide of the informal city is one of the most pressing and perplexing issues facing the planet.

Uneven Growth is a laboratory experiment devoted to the pressing issue not only of ameliorating life in the expanding informal city but—as in Foreclosed—to defining an effective and activist role for architects in the wake of two generations of disinvest-ment in public projects from housing and other public infrastructure projects of a group like the Fragments Project. Toward an incremental realization of fragments of what might be larger networks. Such, for instance, are the infrastructure projects of a group like Urban Think Tank, whose fragment of a cable car extension to Caracas’s public transportation system to weave dense informal quarters into the larger network of the Venezuelan capital was featured in MoMA’s 2010 exhibition Small Scale, Big Change: New Architectures of Social Engagement.

This is a growing trend, in which local knowledge and global expertise might be combined. The novelty of the workshop framed by Pedro Gadano resides precisely in this notion. As in previous iterations of the series, the results are brimming with fresh ideas, striking imaging and imagining, and approaches that are at once specific and adaptable. The enterprise, like tactical urbanism in general, is not free of paradoxes. It seems, for instance, hard to reconcile the gap between the modest scale of some interventions and the dimensions of the worldwide urban and economic crisis that so urgently needs to be addressed. But even as faith in systems, in blueprints, and in master plans has completely collapsed, the optimism of the projects developed here is best embodied in those that want to create paradigms, exemplars, open-ended interventions, and other actions that have at their heart the hopes of a multiplier effect. Strikingly many of the projects take to the rooftops to develop new spaces, new interactions, and new realms for a public zone in situations of dense family occupation. Alternative models not only of building but of ownership and cooperation among citizens are proposed as an invitation to think alternatively rather than as a set of blueprints; some can be realized ad hoc, others presuppose alterations to existing systems at a larger scale of the financial, municipal administrative, or legal regimes.

It remains to be seen if the individual achievements of tactical urbanism’s incarnations—of which there are more every month—can aggregate into an ever-larger impact. However, with Uneven Growth’s invitation to deploy such mode of operation in some of the most rapidly growing urban situations across the planet, a rich array of ideas, images, and new thinking and hopefulness has already been reaped.

—Barry Bergdoll
Curator, Department of Architecture and Design, The Museum of Modern Art

1 Barr, MoMA’s founding director, was writing in the catalogue of the Museum’s tenth anniversary exhibition.
2 Barry Bergdoll, “The Art of Advocacy: The Museum as Design Laboratory,” Design Observer, September 16, 2011. The reactive mode, adapted from the practice of art curation, is one where the architecture curator culls from contemporary or recent production what he or she admires and thinks deserves contextualization and publicity. Such exhibitions have had enormous impact, from MoMA’s inaugural show of 1932, with its proclamation of the International Style, to Deconstructivist Architecture of 1988.
As urbanization continues to expand across the globe, the distribution of spatial and economic resources in cities is increasingly lopsided. As evidenced by numerous academic studies, inequality is growing. In spite of the promise of amelioration that urban migration once represented, life conditions deteriorate for large segments of expanding urban populations. Simultaneously, traditional, centralized urban planning seems to fail when faced with the rising presence of informal settlements, gentrification processes, and other urban phenomena of our days. Driven by ideology or economic incapacity, the ability of the national state to intervene in the contemporary city seems to recede everywhere.

As problematic urban conditions progressively become a subject of concern for specialists in various fields, cities also continue to be the most important sites for everyday struggles at the levels of political governance, civil rights, and social protest. Urban dwellers’ claims for spatial justice and the right to the city appear in multiple forms of appropriation—from the Occupy movement to the Arab Spring, but also in the guise of do-it-yourself urbanism, bottom-up attempts at community self-management, and other tactical forms of urban intervention.

Despite the technological optimism that surrounds some recent urban developments—with its promises of smart management systems, utter social connectivity, and apps for every possible need—large cities around the world are also hotbeds of conceivable catastrophe. Within a gradually globalized order, mega-cities, megalopolises, and other large urban networks are crucial nodes for flows of information and people. Accordingly, they also contain the potential to rapidly propagate any crisis or collapse to the whole system.

As large cities can no longer be seen as isolated, self-sufficient entities, their current and oncoming problems may be anticipated to bear massive impact at a global level. With the planet facing dwindling resources, climate change, and other instabilities, the potential for human catastrophe contained in current urban development has been a regular subject of scholarly research. For sure, city authorities, urban thinkers, economists, and other world protagonists are already joining forces to understand and tackle this issue, having to ensure that over the next decades a constantly expanding urban realm will remain habitable, sustainable, and resilient.

Despite the urgency of these matters, despite the many initiatives that over the last years have sought to bring these problems to light, still the imbalanced growth of the contemporary urban realm is failing to trigger a broader public debate. This alone would make it reason enough for The Museum of Modern Art to join the ongoing efforts to address these problems in academia, in coalitions of cities, and in other international forums. Global museums no longer being exclusively seen as repositories of art, they may take advantage of their public visibility to assume a specific role in promoting awareness, cultural activism, and intellectual discussion at a wider scale.

Assuming the need to expand the responsibility of leading art institutions to new understandings of culture, it was decided that the third iteration of MoMA’s Issues In Contemporary Architecture series should adhere to the international debate on the future of major cities, in collaboration with the MAK - Museum of Applied Arts / Contemporary Art, in Vienna. Following previous initiatives by MoMA’s Architecture and Design...
Department that had engaged interdisciplinary design teams to tackle the effects of rising sea levels in New York, or the impact of the foreclosure crisis in the United States, Unseen Growth: Tactical Urbanism for Expanding Megacities brings together six “collaboratives” of local practitioners and international researchers to examine new design possibilities for six global metropolises: Hong Kong, Istanbul, Lagos, Mumbai, New York, and Rio de Janeiro.

As in previous instances, the curatorial process relied on the creation of unprecedented design proposals through the formulation of public workshops, an exhibition, and this publication. Given the transnational nature of the design teams invited to participate in the project, workshops were held in different venues around the globe, in New York, in Shenzhen, and in Vienna, over the course of one year of brainstorming and discussion. As part of their brief, participants were asked to come up with design scenarios, i.e., design solutions for future developments, which would simultaneously raise awareness of the prevailing inequalities in specific urban contexts and confront the changing roles of architects and urban designers vis-à-vis the evolution of cities.

At the heart of the project lies the optimistic belief that current design thinking can effectively contribute to the current urban debate. Early modern architects and urban designers were recognized for the sense of social responsibility to which they adhered in their efforts of modernization and urbanization at the dawn of the twentieth century. However, the twenty-first century, however, presents us with new and overwhelming challenges in the urban realm. As such, it is urgent that, after much has been collected on the uneven urban developments of the last years, architects and designers again attempt to address the urban problem with responsible, if tentative, propositions. In contrast to other forms of urban speculation, it is imperative that designers’ visions for the future are deployed as a critical tool to reflect upon the problems of today.

1. State of the City

In 2008, the world reaches an invisible but momentous milestone: for the first time in history, more than half its human population, 3.3 billion people, will be living in urban areas. By 2030, this is expected to swell to almost 5 billion. Many of the new urban dwellers will be poor. Their future, the future of cities in developing countries, the future of humanity itself, all depend very much on decisions made now in preparation for this growth. The Mayor of Cities Society

In 2030, the world’s population will be a staggering eight billion people. Of these, two-thirds will live in cities. Most will be poor. With limited resources this profoundly unbalanced growth will be one of the greatest challenges to be faced by societies over more connected across the globe.

Contrary to popular belief and as experts have long warned, urban imbalances have been on the rise over the last three decades. Income disparity, socioeconomic divisions, and spatial inequalities have sharply increased in the most advanced world cities and in emergent megacities alike. As sociologist Saskia Sassen has pointed out, the time is long gone when manufacturing in and around cities “created the conditions for the expansion of a vast middle class.” Today, the escalation of the financial services industry in major cities has instead driven up the incomes of the top percentiles of urban populations while it has reduced the “real wages of workers with the least education.”

And while rural populations are still migrating to urban conglomerations and contributing to the growth of megacities around the globe, their drive no longer lies in the mirage of equal employment opportunities. As Mike Davis has noted in Planet of Slums, rural dwellers are rather pushed to cities—and more precisely to their expanding informal districts—because of a global deterioration of rural conditions. As a consequence of rural-urban migration, urban poverty is on the rise. Due to decreasing upward social mobility and degradation of the lower middle classes, poorer populations in the bigger cities are progressively marginalized into “poverty regimes” that seem more and more to be inescapable.

Even if contemporary cities rely heavily on the services of low-wage workers to sustain their economies, they lack the capacity to absorb the fast-growing numbers of new urban dwellers into their existing formal structure. Thus, informal urbanization expands and, in more or less visible fashion, furbishes existing spatial and social segregations. Often, the resulting urban slums develop their own productive structures, but their populations are nonetheless trapped in a state of chronic poverty: they are blighted by inadequate shelter and health conditions, divested of adequate means to improve their circumstances, and also often deprived of any political and civic rights.

The explosive urban condition sketched here reveals slight variations around the globe. While it may differ according to diverse states of development, it leads to the same question: How can these forms of social and spatial segregation be addressed? As specialists, bene-factors, and institutions such as the World Bank struggle to define the policies and economical mechanisms that may contribute to any kind of improvement, it is even conceivable that such afflctions can be addressed from a design point of view. Can design thinking engage with policy makers and participative community forums, as well as the latest technologi-cal leaps, so as to provide empowerment to urban dwellers who have been dispossessed of practically every resource and right?

This is the challenge that Unseen Growth presents to architects and urban designers: to contribute with critical reflection and a robust vision for how these problems are to be faced in different yet not completely dissimilar urban contexts. In the face of a chosen urban study case, each “collaborative” was asked to turn the potential for catastrophe on its head and explore how the state of urban emergency suggested here is to fuel new modes of design creativity.

With the majority of the planet’s populations transitioning to urban environments, and with the problems that arise from a diffuse, uneven urban condition, much attention has been dedicated to large urban structures in the form of books, exhibitions, and academic research. Concerns over the current city—and, in many cases, over the emergence of informal, so-called “shadow cities”—became widely shared in experts’ circles, and have prompted cultural institutions, professional bodies, governments, and gurus alike to discuss an increasingly daunting urban condition.

To name only a few of the cultural endeavors dedicated to urban phenomena in the last fifteen years, the exhibition Century City was mounted in 2001 at the Tate Modern in London; Mutations was presented during the same year at the Arc en Rêve Centre d’Architecture in Bordeaux; and, under the direction of Ricky Burdett, the Architecture Biennale in Venice was entirely dedicated to the subject in 2006. These large exhibitions presenting overwhelming analyses
and data on current problems in and cultural production out of global urban agglomerations.

Other urban researchers, as well as architects such as Rem Koolhaas, have undertaken countless studies on the nature and phenomena of exploring urban areas, namely in China, Latin America, and Africa. And more recently, while numerous agencies and organizations turned to urban issues, museums and universities joined efforts with global corporations to investigate specific urban transformations. Such was the case of the BMW Guggenheim Lab, launched in 2008 in New York, and more recently, the Audi Urban Future Initiative, hosted by Columbia University in 2013, to mention just two New York–based efforts directed to the theme of future urban mobility.

Vis-à-vis such intense production of knowledge on urban development, Uneven Growth was always intended as a next step. Taking advantage of a museum platform with global reach, the project is intended to bring these topics to a wider and more mixed international audience, fostering a public debate beyond specialized discourse. Simultaneously, it seeks to present design proposals that reflect the urban conditions of different world regions, but also to disclose changing design attitudes toward unequal urban contexts.

2. Tactical Urbanisms and Changing Architectural Practices

A practice of the order constructed by others redistributes its space: it creates at least a certain play in that order, a space for maneuvers of unequal forces and for utopian points of reference. [Innumerable ways of playing with] the city instituted by others characterize the subtle, stubborn resistant activity of a group that much since they lack their own space, have to get along in a network of already established forms and representations. –Michel de Certeau, The Practice of Everyday Life

Urban agglomeration continues to be seen as a sustainable form of human settlement, especially when faced with an inevitable dwindling of natural resources. Yet, as we have briefly analyzed, social conditions in megacities deteriorate, infrastructure grows, and top-down urban planning fails when confronted with rising informality.

Contrary to state initiatives that during most of the twentieth century provided Western nations with heavy investment in mass dwelling and urban infrastructures, in developing countries today city and state authorities remain unable to confront the pace and extension of informal conglomeration in and around major cities.

In a not too distant past, industrialization and social motivations allowed the nation-state to tackle economic disparities through European and North American metropolitan policies. Today, however, slum eradication in megacities with a global presence takes place only if market forces drive social displacement in the name of land value and gentrification. Similarly, as much as architects and urban planners have played a crucial role in addressing the need for affordable housing and an operative city, today they seem too impotent considering the speed at which radical urban inequalities multiply everywhere.

Although attempts are still being made at municipal and regional planning, top-down action, particularly in developing megacities, is mostly entangled in inefficient politics, corrupt bureaucracy, and economic insufficiency. Moreover, with no general turn to neo-liberal policies around the globe—coincident with cyclic financial crises, slowing economic growth, and the constantly impending collapse of any kind of global welfare system—current urban management recedes even in the most advanced and stable urban centers. While mayors and municipal authorities have taken the lead in raising the profile of their cities in a competitive international panorama, urban inequities still flourish and disappear into the streets as a reaction, if not anticipa-
tion to some of these developments, tactical forms of urbanism carried out by varied urban actors have emerged as an attempt to take urban matters into their own hands.

As a counterpart to a classic, strategic notion of top-down planning, tactical urbanism of urbanism have arisen in the form of everyday, bottom-up approaches to local problems within unevenly managed contempo-
rary metropolises. With a pure notion of “tactical urbanism” made difficult by the complexities of any conse-
quent urban project, a plurality of indifferent and embroiled ends of this idea have emerged to respond to the failures of an urban planning exclusively imposed from above.

Tactical urbanisms may impulsively arise from the streets, but they also emerge from given cre-
ative practices and given domains of specialization. Spontaneous takes on the spatial reinvention and appropri-
ation of existing urban environments have thus come to combine top-down initiatives with bottom-up ingenuity, with different levels driving urban contamination. In the form of do-it-yourself actions, hands-on-urbanism and participative urban interven-
ions, artists, architects, designers, city authorities, community leaders, and even policy makers have progres-
sively allied with communities and local political forces to produce an urban activism that often un-
tainted urban contexts. Rather than large-scale transforma-
tions unable to effectively cope with the dynamics of current urban developments, smaller, but still impactful, “urban catalysts” have pervasively become a preferred, if crossed, mode of city interven-
tion. Even if architects and city authorities were the instigators of referential case studies of tactical urbanism—such as the unexpected installation of cable cars in the slums of Caracas—still these responded in innovative tactical fashion to pressing bottom-up needs.

Against this background, a mul-
tificated, hybrid notion of “tactical urbanism” is seen here as draw-
ing on the ideas of the late French anthropologist Michel de Certeau, who suggested that urban dwellers engage in tactical actions when they appropriate urban space on a daily basis. This offers a dialectic in which much of traditional architec-
ture takes refuge—their work often discloses how, when faced with radical city transformations, the urban designer must become an activist.

Further to their participation in the Uneven Growth project, they were invited to reflect on how tactical atti-
udes could inform design visions for the outcomes of contemporary urban inequality. Ultimately, this would constitute the essential drive for the creation of the exhibition’s content.

Uneven Growth’s curatorial project relies on the idea that tactical urbanisms provide inspiration for design tools that effectively mix top-down and bottom-up impulses. Such an idea echoes what has been increasingly described as an open-source urbanism. While propos-
as for future “intelligent cities” raise eyebrows, Saskia Sassen suggests that “multiple small interven-
tions may not look like much, but together they give added meaning to the notion of the incomple-
teness of cities.”

Responding tactically to this incompleteness—or, as others have suggested, to the city’s untapped
resources”—an open-source, “hand-made urbanism”—may precisely mean that, as Sassen has it, cities will continue to enjoy “their long life.”

3. Six Cities, Six Collaboratives

You put together two things that have not been put together before. And the world is changed. People may not notice at the time, but that doesn’t matter. The world has been changed nonetheless.

—Jürgen Habermas, Therelu of Life

If one wants to conceive design scenarios in which tactical modes of urbanism come together to react on contemporary urban contexts, one needs to engage in concrete situations. If one wants to offer consequent, though perhaps site-specific, design visions for the future of the city, one needs to contemplate the diversity of the current project’s goals. This implies that, contrary to previous editions in the Issues in Contemporary Architecture exhibition series, Uneven Growth promotes the conception of a global ambition. The juxtaposition of distinctive, yet comparable global megacities was essential to the curatorial endeavor. Six megacities in six diverse world regions were selected as case studies. The choice of these urban conglomerations was essentially determined by the ways in which they display different degrees, stages, and conditions of urban inequality.

While each city generally represents the level of development of a given region, similar situations were avoided. MoMA’s home city, for example, stands as a case that bears comparison to relevant but absent metropolises such as London, Paris, Tokyo, or Los Angeles. While to some New York came as an unexpected example of inequity, research—not to mention the subsequent political debate of “two cities”—would soon reveal that the financial capital of North America represented only the most advanced stages of a common, if sometimes less visible, story in urban unevenness.

The cities in Uneven Growth were selected on the basis of their considerable size and their potential to generate encounters between a given cosmopolitanism and emergent modes of informal appropriation. Still, there was a clear intention to circumvent megacities that had been overexposed in research projects produced during recent years. In this circumstance, cities such as São Paulo or Mexico City were side-stepped to the advantage of another Latin American city, one that has brought the clash between planned city and informal settlement to the very core of the urban ensemble. Currently undergoing profound transformations due to global events such as the 2014 World Cup and the 2016 Olympics, Rio de Janeiro presented itself not only at the crucial intersection of future change and deeply imbedded spatial conflicts, but also at the forefront of practices of slum regeneration. The existence of urban conflicts in more or less apparent form, along with a tendency to display borders and contrasts between two worlds, were also important criteria to chose the cities that would be the focus of research. Istanbul and Hong Kong are, in their own ways, essential connectors in the increasingly important global fluxes between East and West. Together with Moscow, Istanbul is the only European megacity that is still developing at a furious pace, and it was recently one of two major epicenters of violent urban protests worldwide—the other being Rio de Janeiro. And while Hong Kong is also known for its protest culture, as a borderline island between China and the rest of the world it is also representative of a unique, futuristic condition of urban density.

Finally, Mumbai and Lagos are notoriously relevant when it comes to exemplify the most extreme urban disparities in developing megacities around the world. With both experiencing a relatively recent but explosive population growth, they are paradigmatic of situations in which urban slums assume alarming proportions, alongside immense mobility issues, public health crises, and general infrastructural needs.

Faced with the scope of problems presented by each of these specific urban conditions, it soon became evident that Uneven Growth participants should have an intimate knowledge of local circumstances, and should be already embedded in their object of study. Their previous practices should be somehow be entangled with their city’s realities while revealing changing stances toward the potential role of architects as urban catalysts and activists. From the participative work of Mumbai-based Urba with Dharavi’s slum dwellers to NLÉ’s self-initiated, semi-illegal school project in the floating shantytowns of Lagos, from MAP Office’s long-standing research into the tactical nature of Hong Kong’s everyday uses to Superpool, Rua Arquitetos, and SITU Studio’s reflections on how new design approaches may interfere with the changing urban contexts of Istanbul, Rio, or New York, these were all teams that combined political positions with audacious design capabilities.

Rather than only commissioning these teams to come up with proposals for their respective cities, though, it was also considered that their privileged viewpoints could benefit from confrontation with other external perspectives. Given the global dimension of the contemporary urban issues explored here, collabora-

tions of a transregional nature seemed to be adequate for the purpose of the project. As it had proposed in previous stances, in dealing with such new realities one should overcome postcolonial dichotomies and indeed promote the crossbreeding of multiple knowledges and differentiated standpoints.

As such, teams involved in urban studies at an international level, even if in very different contexts, were also challenged to unite their specific research approaches to the skill sets of the designated local architectural practices. The Network Architecture Lab, at Columbia
It has not always been like this, of course. A more traditional view of curating implies only a rather conservative take on the preservation and display of collectible objects. However, with the notion that curating can itself be a critical practice, this activity may have a more palpable impact in the public perception of building collective concerns. Through new connections that are produced out of a collection, for example, or through the association of themes and experiences that have not been yet considered together, juxtaposition allows for new insights. It allows for new critical perspectives to emerge.

In the case of Uneven Growth, the pairing of local practices to international research teams was deemed essential to produce unforeseen perspectives on urban inequalities in a way that history cannot recover from. Bruce Sterling, Atemporality for the Creative Artist

4. Curating Design Scenarios

It’s all over the place, just termites mounds of poorly organized and extremely potent knowledge, quan- tiluable, interchangeable data with newly networked relations. We cannot get rid of this stuff. It is our new burden, it is there as a fact on the ground, it is a fait accompli. There are new asynchronous communication forms that are globalized and offshored, and there is a loss of a core and a record. There is no single authoritative voice of history. This really changes the narrative, and the organized presentations of history in a way that history cannot recover from.

Following a method of scenario planning developed by military intelligence in the 1950s, the concept of design scenarios was conceived here as combining both a technique to describe a potential future and the design approach that can be imagined in response to such depiction. Acknowledging the role that fictional techniques are increasingly playing in architectural and design thinking, the use of design scenarios in a curatorial context such as that of Uneven Growth presupposes that the anticipation of impending, plausible urban visions may prompt a critical understanding of present problems—thus also contributing to fuel the public debate on those same issues.

Over recent years, we have been presented with architectural speculations sprouting from the most respectable, if improbable, sources. In the 1960s and 1970s radical urban proposals from the likes of British architects Archigram, or the more critically minded Superstudio, in Italy, respond to alarming developments of the so-called consumer society.

As science fiction writer William Gibson put it, the speed of current transformations makes it increasingly difficult to retain a “place to stand from which to imagine a very elabora- rate future.” We no longer benefit from the “luxury of stability,” which we enjoyed not so long ago. The future no longer being “what it used to be,” the proposals in this catalogue and exhibition do at least offer glimpses of a possible, if not uncertain, alter- native universe: an urban prospect in which architects, artists, and other urban practitioners again meld aesthetic endeavors. We no longer benefit from the “luxury of stability,” which we enjoyed not so long ago. The future no longer being “what it used to be,” the proposals in this catalogue and exhibition do at least offer glimpses of a possible, if not uncertain, alternative universe: an urban prospect in which architects, artists, and other urban practitioners again meld aesthetic endeavors.

2 As Davide unifies, cities “have absorbed the majority of the rural labor power made redundant by post-1979 market reforms,” sometimes because the urban agglomeration itself grew to absorb previous rural areas. See Mike Davis, Planet of Slums (London and Ann Arbor, Ann Arbor, 2006), 18-19.

3 For a reading of this, see the first of the many recent publications on radical cities, de Certeau, The Practice of Everyday Life, xiii.

4 As we see in the case of New York, social inequalities inform what can remain invisible under the gaze of the formal city. On this other, as a researcher has recently put it, “the reality of poverty built environments allows us to see, clearer than in other urban environments, the mutations in the nature of social operation.” See Eduardo Azevedo, “Following Engineers and Architects through Slums: The Technomachinist of Slum Intervention in the Portuguese Speaking Landscape,” Análise Social (Instituto de Ciências Sociais da Universidade de Lisboa, Lisbon), no. 48, 2010: 11–16.


7 The urban strategy of urban planners and designers has begun to change the term of favelas and squatter settlements in terms of horizontal practices, capacity building and self-help initiatives. See de Certeau, The Practice of Everyday Life, xiii.

8 See Michael van Manen, The City in Your Hands, Damos (August 2011).

9 As Saska Sassen notes, “in a global age whose key axis is becoming the East-West rather than the North-South one that has dominated an older international colonial history,” Istanbul’s strategic location is “as important.” Similar to Qing Kong, the city is presented as the “economic leader in China,” due to its open economy and its historical connection to international trade. See Sassen, Cities in a World Economy, 190–200, 203–15.


11 The title of this is one of many recent publications portraying diverse incarnations of what is called “tactical urbanism.” See Michael van Manen, “The City in Your Hands,” Damos (August 2011).


13 As Saska Sassen notes, “in a global age whose key axis is becoming the East-West rather than the North-South one that has dominated an older international colonial history,” Istanbul’s strategic location is “as important.” Similar to Qing Kong, the city is presented as the “economic leader in China,” due to its open economy and its historical connection to international trade. See Sassen, Cities in a World Economy, 190–200, 203–15.


15 It is the most crowded urban enclave in sub-Saharan Africa, a region in which, according to UN-Habitat, almost 1/3 of the urban population live in slums. See UN-Habitat, Slums of the World: The State of Urban Poverty in the New Millennium (Nairobi, 2003).


17 “Strengthen horizontal practices and initiatives.” See Saska Sassen, Open Source Urbanism, Damos (June 2011).

18 This idea echoes British sociologist Raymond Williams’ claim that high culture should embrace low culture in order to survive. We seem to be at a moment in which this type of conflation is again relevant. See Raymond Williams, Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society (London: Croom Helm, 1976).

19 As Michael van Manen, The City in Your Hands, Damos (August 2011).

20 As Saska Sassen notes, “in a global age whose key axis is becoming the East-West rather than the North-South one that has dominated an older international colonial history,” Istanbul’s strategic location is “as important.” Similar to Qing Kong, the city is presented as the “economic leader in China,” due to its open economy and its historical connection to international trade. See Sassen, Cities in a World Economy, 190–200, 203–15.


22 For such a reading, see the first of the many recent publications on radical cities, de Certeau, The Practice of Everyday Life, xiii.


24 Shortly after Rio de Janeiro and Istanbul had been chosen as case studies for this project, violent mass protests erupted in both cities, triggered by government initiatives related to urban mobility and gentrification processes. In Istanbul, in particular, before protests actually took place; local authorities and human rights organizations claimed that the “right to the city” by contesting a plan to substitute a central urban park for a shopping mall.

25 Recently, an inflamed Internet debate on “slum-exoticism” and “favela porn” was triggered by the fact that Hong Kong’s 17-year and never demolished Kowloon district remains a subject of research and after curiosity about what was once the densest city on Earth had vanished. See Guy Horton, “The Indicator: The Slum Exotic and the Persistence of Hong Kong’s Ward City,” ArchDaily.com, 2014, <http://www.archdaily.com/?p=481386>.

26 See Marcos Rosa and Ute Weiland, eds., Istanbul, Mexico City, Cape Town: From Advanced Locality to Productive Experimentation (Berlin: Jovis Verlag, 2013).


29 For such a reading, see the first of the many recent publications on radical cities, de Certeau, The Practice of Everyday Life, xiii.

30 For a better understanding of the author’s speculative approach, see Saska Sassen, Cities in a World Economy, 190–200, 203–15.
DESIGN SCENARIOS and Tactical Urbanisms
Compressed between sea and mountains, Hong Kong appears as a chaotic, hybrid, and colorful urban territory with extreme forms of density. Informed by a complex geography, the typical urban idea of concentric growth and continuous spread is replaced by a nonlinear development of hyper-dense cores coexisting with a natural landscape accounting for more than 75 percent of the total land mass. Framed by the city of Shenzhen to the north and the South China Sea on three sides, Hong Kong, 60 percent of which is composed of bodies of water, is surrounded 360 degrees by China. A collection of more than 250 islands, mostly inhabited, the city/territory is now under pressure from Beijing to absorb new waves of urban sprawl in order to accommodate a 50 percent population increase to the existing 7.2 million inhabitants. With the historical struggle for and stress on land resources, Hong Kong's geography is a narrative that is defined and redefined, again and again, according to political intentions and social and economical variations. Contrary to urbanism, it fluctuates in a conflicting appropriation of recognized land and sea.

Following MAP Office’s recent project The Invisible Islands (2013), Hong Kong’s composite territory may be understood through a new perspective: the possibility of populating the sea. The Anthropocene dynamic and the rising sea levels induced by climate change now provide the opportunity to redraw the geographical atlas of the world by altering the coastline and creating new lands. Man-made islands are a valuable alternative to support a sustainable urban expansion with new modes of living, working, and entertaining. Islands are paradigms of the living condition and as such can exacerbate the logic and characteristics of existing modes of production and consumption of urban spaces. Artificial islands are territorial fragments, yet they are constructed and destructed in a cycle that concentrates many of the forces characterizing human civilization. This cycle of production and destruction is a way to escape the present and to project the future.
Myths, legends, fictions, stories, histories—as many narratives as possible are required to define the contours of a new territory.

Until 2047, Hong Kong faces many questions related to its unique condition as a Chinese city outside the contour of the motherland. The possibility of an exponential population growth is a main concern regarding its future stability. Hong Kong’s limited land restrains possible population growth to three options: reclaiming more land on the water, urbanizing the protected country parks—two options that Hong Kong citizens have long fought against—and creating artificial islands in portions of the territorial water that are not yet exploited. In this context, Hong Kong could serve as a laboratory for an island scheme that could be extended to the Pearl River Delta and further along the coastline of China.

Hong Kong Is Land proposes to add eight new artificial islands to the existing landscape of 263 islands. In this way it addresses various needs and features of prevailing contexts as well as those of the near future. These artificial lands also provide distinctive hubs for tourism. Yet they cannot be recognized solely as islands nor generate maritime zones. More than a response to an unbalanced geography, the eight corresponding scenarios can be interpreted as a new language in which to promote universal values. At the center of this project, beginning in Hong Kong territorial waters, there is a global awareness of specific contemporary issues that aims to reach other parts of the world.

With only 30 kilometers of land border in the northern part of the territory, Hong Kong is surrounded by water representing 85 percent of its territorial boundaries. Surrounding it on all sides, China situates the city/territory as an integrated part of the motherland.

The strategy of reclaiming land over water has been the main principle for development and for absorbing various waves of migration. This mode of operation, shown above, is now very much under popular criticism.

Since the early 1970s, territorial pressure has pushed the authorities to develop “new town” scenarios. At left, Tung Chung New Town, serving Hong Kong International Airport, emerges from the countryside park of Lantau Island. The new town appears as a concrete island to supply the growing demand for housing facilities.
The coexistence of rural activities with high-density living imposes a system in which the territory experiences extreme pressure. Countryside communities are in danger of disappearing. Above, the Lau Fau Chan oyster farm exists in the shadows of Tin Shui Wai New Town.

Density of building is one of the main characteristics of Hong Kong’s urban context. The verticalization of living has led authorities to develop subsidized housing typologies that are now inhabited by 45 percent of Hong Kong’s population.

The Pearl River Delta Region, natural setting of Hong Kong city/territory, is among the most populated conurbations in the world. With one of the most important and productive global economies, the region remains dominated by its liquid geography.

The location of the eight proposed artificial islands across Hong Kong territory is based on a process of decontextualization and reterritorialization of existing life scenarios. Each island epitomizes one of Hong Kong’s characteristic values from a territorial, social, economic, and futuristic perspective.
Water is an essential source of life and its access is a basic human right. “The Island of Sea” is a living organism merging an aqua-structure with a fishing community. Made of Asian vernacular architecture layered together, the organization of the floating village is directly inspired by the condition of its liquid environment. Here the water is the source of economic survival. This mode of aquaculture offers the possibility of a new economy and food production. Set directly under the house or to either side, seaweed and fish replace the fields the polluted land has lost.

“The Island of Resources” relies on the strong networking capability of the expatriate Filipino community. Through the collection and distribution of basic resources, the island is an asset to nearby emergency zones in case of natural or human disasters. Inspired by the form of a trading pit, it is an organic geometric structure suggesting a multifaceted relationship between inside and outside, surface and volumes. At the center a crater—a dense place sheltering the most precious resources—defends its treasure like a giant safe.
“The Island of Surplus” in Junk Bay is an unstable archipelago made of a complex accumulation and compression of various types of discarded material. Fragments of trash collide in an entropically generated landscape. Abandoned detritus shaped by years of accretion resemble prehistoric vestiges of an ignorant civilization. Yet it is also one of the most visited parts of Victoria Harbor, with its unique silhouettes reminiscent of Ha Long Bay.

“The Island of the Self” is a floating territory made of an intricate assemblage of alleys in the form of a maze. Constructed as a supertanker, it floats along the invisible borderline to the south of Hong Kong, a no man’s zone where illegal consumption is authorized. With tanks shaped in the form of buildings, the island is made of an infinite network of pipes, wires, and gutters that serve as the main organs feeding an intoxicated population. Dark and wet, the labyrinth offers a secretive feast of drugs, adventure, and sex.
Hong Kong Is Land is a map of possible islands comprised within Hong Kong territory. Each island exacerbates a condition through which the city/territory can be embraced from its past, present, and future; each island focuses on a specific economy, ecology, and community.
Uneven growth can only be solved through politics, but politics is broken when left in the hands of poll-driven politicians and screaming extremists. The New City Reader is a tactical newspaper installed in a public space that asks us to slow down, stop looking at our electronic devices, and once again read and discuss matters civilly in public. Based on the Chinese dazibao, handmade newspapers posted in public during the Cultural Revolution, the New City Reader is intended to be hung throughout the city—it is a tactical intervention that anyone can do.

Included for free in the Hong Kong edition of the New City Reader, SYMTACTICS is a board game that teaches individuals to explore the relationship between strategic and tactical thinking as players race around a dystopian Hong Kong of the near future. As in other games, players are able to explore and work through the concerns of a given social setting. Just as “The Landlord’s Game,” patented in 1904 and a precursor to Monopoly, taught people about the problems generated by accumulated wealth, SYMTACTICS allows anyone to try their hand at lowering inequality through the completion of tactical interventions while fending off challenges from outside forces.
TACTICAL URBANISMS: EAST ASIA

Thecaveworkshop. Wave of Growth, Hong Kong. 2012

Dai Haifei/standardarchitecture. Egg House, Beijing. 2010


Dakun-met Architects/Nawakanji-m. Sugersoku Office, Gifu, Japan. 2011

Eltono. 1/1 Project, Caochangdi, Beijing. 2012

HK Honey. HK Farm, Ngau Tau Kok, Kowloon East, Hong Kong. 2012


Shigeru Ban Architects. Hualin Temporary Elementary School, Chengdu, China. 2008


John Lin and Olivier Oltmans. The Pinch Library and Community Center, Yunnan Province, China. 2012

West 8. Garden of 10,000 Bridges, Xi’an, China. 2011

Toshiko Horiuchi MacAdam and Interplay. Wonder Space II at the Hakone Open-Air Museum, Japan. 2009

William Lim of CL3. West Kowloon Bamboo Theater, Hong Kong. 2013

For more information: http://unevengrowth.moma.org
Project Credits

**Hong Kong**

MAP Office
Based in Hong Kong since 1995, MAP Office is a multidisciplinary platform devised by Laurent Gutierrez and Valérie Portefaix that works on physical and imaginary territories using a variety of media to critique spatio-temporal anomalies. Both teach at the School of Design, Polytechnic University. www.map-office.com

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**Istanbul**

Superpool
Superpool, founded by Selva Gürdoğan and Gregers Tang Thomsen in 2006, critically investigates Istanbul through exhibitions and temporary projects including Mapping Istanbul (Garanti Gallery/ SALT, 2009), a two-year project examining the city through maps, comparative research, and essays. www.superpool.org

Nikitas Gkavogiannis, Selva Gürdoğan, Gregers Tang Thomsen, Zehra Nur Eliaçık, Derya lylik, and Betül Nuhoglu, in collaboration with Memed Erdiener, Asbjorn Lund, and Fahri Özkarmanli

Vienna MAK Workshop Participants: Matthieu Flores, Zoe Georgiou, Christine Hötter, and May Krivaniš

Shenzhen Workshop Participants: Chu Hou San and Tiago Guilherme Cheong

**Athletics d'Architecture Autogérée**

Atelier d'Architecture Autogérée
Founded by Constantin Petcou and Doina Petrescu in 2001, Atelier d'Architecture Autogérée conducts actions and research on participative architecture, developing tools to enable collective appropriation of temporarily available spaces by city dwellers and their transformation into self-managed urban commons. www.urbantactics.org/

Constantin Petcou and Doina Petrescu, in collaboration with Marguerite Wable, Jeremy Galvan, Bèste Kuçsu, Augustin Reynaud, and Kim Trogal

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**Lagos**

NLÉ
NLÉ is an architecture, design, and urbanism practice based in Lagos and Amsterdam focusing on city development research and strategy advisory service; conceptualization and creative structuring; architecture, products, and infrastructure design; and arts and cultural urban interventions. www.neworks.com

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Collaborators: Tunji Badejo, Oleakwen Jeleyn, and JQF Television

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Inteligencias Colectivas is an open free database of nonstandard architectural and urban solutions developed by Zoohaus. Zoohaus is an ever-evolving meta-studio of individuals and collectives working together from different parts of the world. www.inteligenciascolectivas.org

Uneven Growth Team: David Berkvens, Juan Chacón, Manuel Dominguez, Mafi Durant, Esteban Fuertes, Luis Galán, Elisa de los Reyes Garcia, Juanito Jones, Manuel Pascual, Luis de Prada, and Lys Villalba, with the contributions of Alfredo Borghi, Miguel Martinez, Daniel Morcillo, Julia García, Antzane del Rio, and Monk Jones

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Founding Partners: Matias Echanove, Rahul Srivastava, and Geeta Mehta

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Ensemble Studio/MIT-POPlab
Founded in 2008, learns from its environment while contributing to its improve-ment. With offices in Mumbai and Goa, URBZ organizes participatory planning and design workshops in multiple countries. http://urbz.net/

URBZ, founded by Matias Echanove, Rahul Srivastava, and Geeta Mehta

Uneven Growth Team: Matias Echanove, Rahul Srivastava, Geeta Mehta

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Mumbai

URBZ: user-generated cities
URBZ, founded by Matias Echanove, Rahul Srivastava, and Geeta Mehta in 2008, learns from its environment while contributing to its improve-ment. With offices in Mumbai and Goa, URHZ organizes participatory planning and design workshops in multiple countries. http://urbz.net/

Founding Partners: Matias Echanove, Rahul Srivastava, and Geeta Mehta

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**New York**

SITU Studio
Founded in 2006 in Brooklyn, SITU's workspace is split evenly between a fabrication shop and a design studio, reflecting its commitment to interro-gating design ideas through physical and material experimentation at a wide range of scales. www.situstudio.com

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